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Becoming a counsellor in a second language: A reflexive case study

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Preface

I hereby declare that this thesis:

- a. has been composed by myself
- b. contains my own original work
- c. has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification
- d. has not included any publication that are my own work

Xuebing Liu

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the trainee counsellor's experience of speaking a second language in counselling practice. It is based on a single in-depth case study, examining the author's experience of practice during her training and in her first post-qualification years. Through a detailed exposition of the practitioner's countertransference experience in relation to her use of a second language, it identifies three positions, termed 'Worrying and Stumbling', 'Connecting and Attuning' and 'Relaxing and Playing'. Detailed practice examples are provided to illustrate each position. Like Klein's use of the term, positions are conceptualised not as chronological or fixed stages, but as ways of being in relation which can dominate or recede at any time. In contrast to the problem-focused perspective that characterises existing research on second language use in counselling, this thesis provides evidence of the opportunities that arise in the therapeutic relationship when the counsellor is working in a second language, even arguing that second language use can be an asset. As counselling and psychotherapy become increasingly globalised, with counsellors and clients often no longer sharing the same native tongues, this thesis makes a timely contribution to research focused on the counsellor's experience in this setting. Shedding new light on the experience of trainees working in a second language, it offers insights to counselling educators, researchers, practitioners and trainees.

Key words: second language, countertransference, reflexivity, power dynamics, counselling trainee, transition

Lay Summary

The use of a second language becomes prevalent in the field of counselling and it can be challenging to start practicing in a non-native language. From my own counselling practice, I excerpt six case examples to discover what it is like for a trainee to develop a sense of competency in a second language. The project challenges the “taken-for-granted” anxieties and worries around speaking a non-native language. It gives voice to unspoken clamour inside a counsellor because of language barrier. It aims to reveal a meaningful transition from beginner to competent practitioner. The case examples give a sense of realness to represent the experiences and the reflexive analysis of them shows the nature of the counselling relationship. Based on the in-depth exploration, I discover that a practitioner is likely to move to and fro three positions—“Worrying and Stumbling”, “Connecting and Attuning”, and “Relaxing and Playing” in the usage of a second language throughout the development.

1. Introduction

Five years ago, I came to Edinburgh to study for an MSc in Counselling Studies. The course features a dialogue between the person-centred and the psychodynamic perspectives. The first time I sat with so many international students I was left feeling very stimulated but anxious. I was not the only non-native student, but my attention could not really be diverted from my own feelings towards observing how other people were doing. It was an intense moment. On the one hand, I experienced a sense of achievement about having travelled so far to study in a foreign country; on the other hand, a lot of doubt arose as to how I was going to continue.

This first experience of an academic setting in a foreign language was unforgettable. My English was not conversationally excellent. I managed to get through all the lectures and seminars; sometimes, when faced with jokes that I could not understand I laughed with the others anyway. During that first year, I experienced this conflict in terms of speaking English as a second language: sometimes giving myself a hard time for not being able to fully understand the conversation, at other times giving myself a pat on the back for speaking up and offering my opinions in group discussions. After the first year of theoretical learning, I decided to continue by pursuing professional training in counselling, since I had always wanted to do some practical work. Though I was aware that language was likely to be very a challenging issue, I had the motivation and courage to do the training at that time because I had managed well with self-reflective writing on the course and I found it revealing and therapeutic.

Once I had enrolled in the programme, undergoing the training and seeing clients became very difficult tasks which challenged both my academic performance and my sense of self. Language played an enormous part because its usage is a daily, essential, and all-pervasive task. The anxiety increased rapidly when I started a placement in my second language. My English was good enough to help me through a Master's degree, but face-to-face communication proved very different from academic use of language. In an academic setting I didn't need to face my readers' confusion directly, but in the counselling placement I had to encounter clients' reactions immediately. I could not help feeling wary of practising in a foreign language. It was hard to face the fact that I might not be able to understand another person's speech when I was supposed to be in a helping role.

Notwithstanding my initial clumsiness in language, the experience of working with clients really opened up my true passion for the field, particularly the work with children. There were struggles with inexperience and the language barrier, but there were also inspiring insights and exploration of my professional identity. From the outset I felt massive doubt; even acknowledging to clients and colleagues my inexperience as a second language-speaking counsellor was painful and somehow humiliating. But the sense of incompetence changed with time and experience. Through my personal counselling, I became increasingly aware that my fear of failure and sense of ignorance played a part in my relationship with clients. With these unacknowledged, usually hard-to-confront anxieties in mind, I started looking

at articles on second language use in counselling, in the hope that someone could make sense of my experiences of practising in a second language.

In the next chapter I will present a review of literature that has been profoundly helpful in making sense of my struggles with language. Engaging with the psychoanalytic literature has enabled me to understand the connection between language and self, and thus to dig into what actually influences my capacity for speaking English. Being grounded in this body of research turned out, surprisingly, to help me to speak more fluently and feel more at ease in my practice. It was like a period of self-processing which actually made it easier to work through that anxious state of mind whenever I revisited it. The focus of my practice has shifted gradually along with the understanding of myself working as a counsellor in a second language. It's no longer so much about me being an inexperienced trainee; instead I can shift the attention away from myself towards actively listening to my clients and thinking through our relationships, as well as developing my presence with them. I gradually became able to offer the psychological space my clients needed and to feel less and less restrained by my capacity for speaking English. I began to find these anxieties and fears no longer so overwhelming and shameful as when I started; instead they could be put aside most of the time and only occasionally revisited. Now, after four years of practice, I feel much more confident in my work, as if I have gone through a transformation; I actually feel able to do this without worrying about the language.

This autobiographical narrative of my experience as a trainee in Edinburgh explains the origin of this topic of study. This experience has been a long, often uneasy, sometimes rewarding, personal as well as professional transition as an international trainee, developing professionally and adapting to the cultural and counselling environment in the UK. Apart from the psychoanalytic theories I mentioned above, as my training is based on a dialogue between person-centred and psychodynamic perspectives, theories from both schools guide me in comprehending and interpreting my counselling practice in English. Initially, as I started to examine those fearful feelings, I attributed a lot of the anxiety to language barriers, to my non-proficiency in English. However, through self-reflection, without taking the language issue for granted but discussing in many supervision sessions how it affected my relationship with clients, I found that it offered a much richer account of the theme. The journey inspired me to make sense of this experience, to explore the challenge of speaking a second language throughout this process of training and practice, and to share thoughts with others engaged in counselling, especially as more and more international trainees come to be trained as counsellors and experience concern over their capacity to practise in a second language.

This piece of research aims to contribute to the understanding of what it is like as an international trainee to embark on learning and practising in a second language. It begins by reviewing what previous literature has examined regarding the use of a second language in counselling, and what theoretical insights exist in the area of language and therapeutic work. I would also like to explore the empirical literature on the experiences of other second language-speaking counsellors.

The literature review is followed by an account of the methodology, in which I will discuss the ontological and epistemological questions the research engages with. That chapter will unravel the nature of the material needed to generate the knowledge that the research question seeks. Then I will decide the method adopted in this research. How I collected data, the way I worked with the data, and questions of ethics will also be explained in the methodology chapter. Next, I will present the research findings in the data analysis chapter, which constitutes the core contribution to the field of second language usage in counselling. Since I am trained in the integration of person-centred and psychodynamic perspectives, I will use those theories to conceptualize and support the argument of this thesis and the understanding of my practice. Lastly I will give the conclusion to the thesis, addressing its limitations and indicating the scope it provides for further development in future.

Clarification of definitions

In the varied body of research in the field of counselling, terms such as counselling, psychotherapy, “patients” and “clients” are used interchangeably. Following the literature I cite, in this thesis I will mainly adopt the terms “counselling” and “counsellor” to refer to the therapeutic setting and the professional person, and “clients” rather than “patients” to refer to the people I work with. I would also like to clarify the definitions of two key terms in this thesis: “mother tongue” and “second language”. The term “mother tongue” mainly refers to the language of a mother, who

is often a baby's main carer (Collins Cobuild-advanced Learners English Dictionary, 2006); it is hence the language a baby is first exposed to intensively and goes on to learn to speak in later life . It could refer to the dominant language one feels most comfortable with and able to use. A second language is defined in this thesis as a language that one learns in school, or in adult life, and that often does not have the same strength, proficiency or a body of implicit knowledge built upon as the mother tongue(s) (Corder, 1992; Gass, 2013). Some people can be highly fluent in a second language, so it can be a quite complicated, even impossible, task to differentiate every situation from every other (Georgiadou, 2014). In the context of discussion of second language, I would therefore like to narrow down the definitions as follows: a mother-tongue is a language in which early experience is directly referred to, in which one's early emotional experience is embedded, and in which internal representations are established upon (Corder, 1992). With the aim of exploring the psychological process of using a relatively foreign language, I would like to mainly focus on the experience of counsellors who speak and work in counselling in a later-learned second language. They usually achieve an adequate level of proficiency in the context of work, but there remains a clear difference between the mother tongue(s) and the second language, with priority given to the former. In addition, I will use "native" and "non-native" to refer exclusively to language use rather than to a person's sense of belonging to or connection with a host country (Georgiadou, 2014).

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

Learning a foreign language has become more common in recent years as the result of globalization. English is spoken throughout the world, often as a second language, and has become the medium of communication for people worldwide. This is also the case in the counselling profession. It is no longer surprising when either the client or the counsellor speaks a non-native language in counselling; sometimes neither party speaks his/her mother tongue(s) but both communicate in a shared second language. Universities and training agencies also receive more international trainee students (Lau & Ng, 2012). The discussion of how foreign language usage impacts on the counselling relationship has therefore attracted increased research attention in the field. Trainees express their concerns over counselling in a second language and there is a call for a more holistic understanding of the experience (Georgiadou, 2015).

Following the interest aroused by my experience as a second language counselling practitioner, I would like to look at what has been studied and researched on this topic. I will summarize and discuss the existing literature on second language use in counselling in order to narrow down the research question of this thesis, on the basis of previous studies. To start with, I think it is important to explore the fundamental importance of language – particularly the “relationship” between language and one’s self in both the mother tongue and a second language. Language carries significance

in the construction of personal meaning and in one's relationship with others. Speaking a non-native language in a foreign country is not a purely technical issue that people can resolve easily. Language contains more than verbal communication. Therefore I choose to look at the meaning of language by exploring the early psychoanalytic literature. This early work exists because, from the inception of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysts and analysands worked across languages (Breuer & Freud, 1891). Secondly, I would like to research contemporary literature on second language use in counselling with reference to its impact on counsellors, clients, and the counselling relationship, to find out how other researchers and counsellors have experienced and discussed this issue and what conclusions they have reached. Thirdly, because of my interest in the thought-provoking transition from trainee to qualified and competent practitioner, I would like to review the literature on counselling trainees' experiences, looking at particular challenges, difficulties and strengths that second language speaking trainees often face and how they develop the sense of competence in the progression from novice to expert level in their second language. Lastly, based on the findings of previous studies I will offer a conclusion to the literature review and identify the questions that this body of research has not fully answered along with the ways this thesis could contribute to the field.

2.2 Language is fundamental: a psychoanalytic perspective

It is essential to understand what is so significant about language and to explore the meaning of language and the relation a language bears to one's self: for example, whether speaking a particular language affects who we are and how we see

ourselves. In this section, I will focus on people's experiences of speaking a language rather than on the mechanism of language learning. Researchers from classic psychoanalytic and object-relations traditions argue that the way language relates to one's self is not a simple process of conscious communication and ego function, but is also governed by the unconscious and the superego. They suggest that when a language is learned and used, there is a complex activation of one's defence mechanisms; as a result, a different language often leads to a different self-image or sense of identity (Buxbaum, 1949; Greenson, 1950). How we speak a language varies individually in tone, accent, speed, volume, and emotion etc. Each aspect has traces of one's upbringing, class, race, or history; for example, an accent often contains clues to a person's background, profession, class, or ethnicity (Corson, 1993). It is important to seek the reason why language carries so many traces of a person's history before going on to study the phenomenon of speaking a second language in relation to the history of one's personality, identity, and emotions. It may seem that this history is lost and that these elements might need to be revisited, reconstructed, or renewed in the new language.

Words carry memories and experiences (Balkányi, 1964). Freud (1923, p. 20) suggests that through becoming connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it, a thing becomes preconscious, and can become conscious again if it has once been conscious. It is through "word-presentations", which I think means using words to describe our experiences, that the meaning that was hidden in the unconscious can become conscious. On the basis of his clinical work, Freud (1923, p. 20) suggests that "some traces of memory reside in the unconscious", and if

allowed they can become conscious again. The term “memory residue” here means memories that have once registered in one’s mind and body. He claims that “only something which has once been a conscious perception can become conscious, and that anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions” (Freud, 1923, p. 20). Here Freud referred to pathologically traumatic memories which are rejected by one’s conscious mind because they are too threatening to the ego’s stability, so that clients repress the experiences into the unconscious. Repression, as one kind of defence mechanism, is a very prominent concept in psychoanalysis; it is defined as the act of repelling what is unacceptable from one’s conscious mind. For example, in clinical work it is not uncommon that clients find it difficult to talk about bereavement or loss when it is very raw, so that the word “death” or “cancer” can evoke a lot of psychological anxiety and stress. This shows that words have power; the language we speak is highly charged emotionally. By saying the words people could experience the feeling that the words aroused, or could even relive the relevant event. These experiences are not always currently active in one’s consciousness, so they might still function as usual in life at times when one isn’t aware of them. In other words, these traces lurk in the unconscious or preconscious. In the example above, the word “death” can represent painful experiences of loss, fear and anxiety; for a client who has recently lost a significant person, the mention of the word “death” can feel like an actual and complete loss: a reality that the words bring to the surface. Emotions are embedded in words.

Furthermore, in my opinion, language, conveniently and commonly used in counselling and psychotherapy, may function as a vessel to contain experiences. Unlike thought repression, feelings are “more primordial, more elementary, than perceptions arising externally”, and they can arise even when consciousness is clouded (Freud, 1923, p. 21). This idea suggests the hypothesis that language is not necessarily the medium through which one’s unconscious feelings become conscious. Feelings are either conscious or unconscious, according to Freud; i.e. feelings do not need the intermediary of the pre-conscious mind, namely word-representations. For example, I can feel angry and not know why I am feeling that way, and if I have not learned the word I will not even know it is called “anger”. If some experience occurs at the pre-verbal or pre-memory age, I am unlikely to know what that feeling is by name, but I do experience it. I will need to express it if it is significant and unresolved. Feelings sometimes can be distorted and appear in other forms; for example, anger or anxiety might have its root in the fear of abandonment, or worry about essential needs not being met.

Starting with the connection between language and experiences as found in Freud’s work, in this review I would also like to discuss the relational meaning of language in the mother tongue and in a foreign language. What happens consciously and unconsciously when we speak a language? Feeling is an indicator of what happens inside us and it is not entirely constrained by language (Freud, 1923). Thereafter I will also look at how the literature makes sense of our feelings about speaking a new language and how it affects the act of speaking.

2.2.1 Symbolization

In order to answer these questions I would like to draw attention to the process of identification and symbolization in language learning in both the mother tongue and a second language, because it is highly relevant to the development of our sense of self. Identification is significant in all ego development and the process of learning our dominant language involves identification throughout childhood (Stengel, 1939). Most of us start language learning from birth, or even before birth. It is not uncommon for parents to speak to the baby during pregnancy. We capture the sounds around us and imitate the speaking of words from a very young age. The object and the corresponding word are experienced and learned throughout the whole of infancy and childhood. It is important that from our experience of being contained by the significant others around us, through identification with these others we learn to talk and then to symbolize and verbalize things, and to make sense of the world (Segal, 1991). Here the term “significant others” usually refers to the mother and father who are the baby’s main carers. Melanie Klein (1923, p. 75) writes that “speaking is the first sublimation”, and it is significantly related to how we learn about our own individuality and others. Greenson (1950, p. 75) also suggests that the mother tongue can be seen as “the bearer of important unresolved conflicts” because the learning of language occurs primarily during the first years of life. In this process, there is an important concept called “symbol formation”, whereby a word literally equals a thing (Klein, 1930). It is an essential stage of one’s psychological development. At this stage, phantasy and hallucination equal reality to the infant. As he/she begins to learn a word, initially from hearing the word, a means of symbolizing things is

achieved by knowing that the word corresponds with the thing. Because the word can represent the thing, it creates a way to differentiate reality from phantasy. The word no longer is the thing, but becomes the representation of the thing. The mother tongue, as the first and primary form of symbolism, comes to be “the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation”, and “upon it is built up the subject’s relation to the outside world and to reality in general” (Klein, 1930, p. 26). Mother-tongue(s) separates but also bridges the self and objects. It facilitates differentiation between phantasy and reality, between concrete thinking and symbolic thinking.

Melanie Klein (1930) places a lot of importance on the development of symbolism and she came to the conclusion that if symbolization does not occur, the whole development of the ego is arrested. Therefore, from a psychological perspective, the term “symbolism” stands for “a relation between the ego, the object, and the symbol” (Segal, 1957, p. 392). Symbolism functions by separating symbolization and what’s actually there, so that the name “Jim” stands for a person, and “hit” represents the action of punching. Through language children gradually learn to express destructive feelings through “naming” them rather than actually causing the damage named – by saying “I want to hit Jim” rather than actually doing so. It achieves the separation between what’s introjected inside a person, and what is actually out there.

Mother-tongue not only facilitates the process of separation and independence as between inside and outside; the dominant language also *is* the process and carries the weight of the process; therefore speaking a second language challenges our sense of self and shakes up our style of relating to others (Stengel, 1939). Thus it is not hard

to imagine that challenging the accustomed symbolization by expressing feelings in a non-native language arouses anxiety through inhibiting the process of symbol formation, in turn inhibiting the process of symbolization. It's no longer the same sound we know so vividly as "trees", but some other sound which does not really make much sense. There is not only a loss of familiarity, but also a loss of the way we make sense of the sound, the internal representation, and the interaction. The need to reconstruct the sound and the sentence so as to make them one's own requires a long period of time during which we experience the sounds repeatedly. I know from my own experience that when "sadness" turns into some other sound, it is not "sad" any more. Moreover, as it is upon mother-tongue that a way of relating to others is established (Stern, 1985), it is inevitable that a change of language leads to a certain loss of interaction between one person and another. The view of a second language as a disturbance of already established symbol-formation in the mother-tongue sheds light on the anxiety felt when speaking it. The predominant language, the mother-tongue, is the language that helps a child to think beyond the concrete – by thinking about the "names" of things such as feelings or objects. It has deeply interpersonal meaning because it is the first language that a child learns and that enables him/her to be intelligible when relating to other people. The adult-learned second language will not carry the same weight and richness of emotion, because it embodies no similar experience of being contained physically and psychologically by our significant others (Winnicott, 1963).

Literature suggests that, for immigrants, speaking a second language means loss of the familiarity of objects or even loss of the objects themselves, as well as the

difficulties encountered in separating from those objects (Volkan, 1981). There is possibly a “double-layered” difficulty experienced when speaking a second language. Firstly there is loss of familiar identity, and secondly loss of the symbolization of the loss. It means that there is no good-enough “name” for the loss in one’s adult-learned language. The failure to be intelligible as a second language speaker is inevitably a scary and lonely experience, much like an infant’s fear of being powerless, vulnerable and exposed to an external threat, or of failing to be contained by the significant other. Thus it is natural that speaking a second language evokes complex defence mechanisms to protect us from infantile helplessness and psychological instability.

2.2.2 Superego and resistance

Having looked at the significance of symbolization when learning the mother tongue in the course of one’s linguistic and psychological development, I would like to shift the focus towards second language use. Here I will discuss the unconscious process with an emphasis on the function of the superego and the resistance to speaking a second language. A variety of research has offered different perspectives on using a new language. For example, it has been seen as activating one’s defence mechanisms, as re-establishing one’s identity, and also as arousing relational resistance in transference and countertransference (e.g. Stengel, 1939; Buxbaum, 1949; Aragno & Schlachet, 1996; Bowker & Richards, 2004). The literature on second language use in counselling and psychotherapy can be traced to Freud’s early analytic work.

Freud first mentioned second language use in his work *Anna O* (Breuer & Freud, 1891), and Freud himself once practised as a bilingual psychotherapist. He did not specifically discuss his own experience of speaking a second language in treatment, but Freud's (1915) idea of "primary repression", whereby an individual repels his/her own desires or impulses by excluding them from consciousness, helps us to understand the difficulty of learning a new language. Repression operates to protect the ego from threat, and this also happens when speaking the non-native language. Stengel (1939, p. 472) writes about the difficulty of finding the one right word to name an object, action or feeling in a second language; the "dissatisfaction and even a certain sense of guilt" thereby experienced suggests that our superego watches over the rules that govern the relations between words and objects. A later-learned language will often not have the same level of richness and precision as the mother-tongue(s), and the failure to find the word that "best fits" often causes frustration. A second language which hasn't been acquired through early experience can feel remote and lacking in visceral impact.

Furthermore, Stengel (1939, p. 474) points out that the images following the word in a foreign language are "more primitive and concrete", whereas mother tongue(s) convey a "lifeless pattern". This means that in a foreign language a word tends to go through the process of "symbol formation" and therefore conveys a straightforward image, whereas in the mother-tongue the same word might appear mundane because of being taken for granted, but nevertheless contains enormous associations with past experiences. I think there is an arbitrary relation between the symbol and the actual

thing that you first hear in a second language. The metaphorical meanings of the word often die in a second language (Freedman, 2017). On the one hand, we feel our mother tongue very viscerally; though it seems to be “the lifeless pattern”, it is in our body and can be aroused in different ways; on the other hand, in a foreign language, the metaphorical quality of the word is completely gone and it is heard just as the word with its concrete meanings. The foreign speakers usually get the literal meaning of the word but not its underlying historical as well as sometimes personal associations.

Learning a second language has characteristics resembling the childhood process of learning a first language, i.e. building a relation with the language; and this can lead to re-experiencing the helpless state of infancy and the early anxieties connected with it (Stengel, 1939). Though it is possible that individuals draw new connections between a word and an object in a second language, that correspondence does not carry early memories – the “libidinal relations to objects” – with it; that is, the memories of being held, that become attached to the word during infancy (Stengel, 1939, p. 474). Therefore the same word in a second language usually lacks the personal-experience part of the meaning, the living image or feelings relevant to the object. This fact may explain the inaccessibility of early experience when one speaks a second language. Stengel (1939, p. 473) tries to explain the difference between our libidinal relation to an object denoted by a word in a foreign language and our relation to the same object denoted by a word in the native language. He explains that “learning a new language involves interjecting new objects”, with the new language often seeming poor and somewhat rudimentary or even being “felt as false”

(Stengel, 1939, p. 474). He proposes the idea of the embodied “distance” that a second language can create. Using a second language enables one to feel less threatened as one distances oneself from the associations of the past through “circumventing” the efficacy of the superego (Stengel, 1939, p. 473). Since primitive emotions mainly attach to the mother-tongue, by using second-language words with the same meaning one can avoid facing the threats directly, as the mediating translation reduces the original threat. For example, Aragno and Schlachet (1996, p. 25) study the accessibility of early experience through the language of origin and conclude that “in the unconscious region of the mind, memory traces remain attached to the thing cathexis, in contrast to the conscious articulation of the word cathexis”. The thing cathexis includes the sounds of the first, intensely charged vocables, the rich cognitive blend of sensory meanings and primary attachments etc. Though a second language is learned for the purpose of communication, describing facts etc., it is often regarded as inadequate for reflecting the truth, or is even felt as false (Stengel, 1939).

Thus Buxbaum (1949) suggests that in counselling, a bilingual patient might use a second language as an unconscious defence against the re-emergence of repressed fantasies and memories experienced in the primary language. Speaking a new language can create emotional distance from intolerable feelings; thus Buxbaum (1949) proposes that psychoanalysis only progresses when the patient can express feelings in his/her native language. The equivalent foreign word will not have the same emotional connotations (Buxbaum, 1949; Bowker & Richards, 2004).

Buxbaum (1949, p. 286) explains that:

“Verbalising experiences in the language in which they occurred makes them become real; speaking of them in any other language renders them unreal. Language in this way becomes the vehicle for reviving the past and releasing unconscious wishes and emotions into consciousness. The difficulty encountered by a client in expressing himself is one measure of his resistance; in some instances the pressure exerted by the superego is so strong that the patient is unable to say anything. The superego uses its power to counteract the magic of speech.”

Buxbaum’s explanation applies not only to clients, but also to counsellors who work in a second language. Sometimes the resistance to a foreign language is conscious while at other times it arises unconsciously. As Buxbaum (1949, p. 289) explains, “it can be employed as an additional defence mechanism, reinforcing repression and also as a means of weakening the strength of the superego”. Thus, “The ability to learn to speak foreign languages may be dependent on unconscious feelings which are under the control of the superego” (Buxbaum, 1949, p. 289). The superego works differently in the mother tongue and in a second language. In the native language, it often works to protect the ego from threatening associations with the past. In a foreign language, its function is usually to prevent the ego from embarrassing the person or making him/her feel incompetent. This answers the question “What happens consciously and unconsciously when we speak a language?” Therefore, as long as a second language speaker becomes aware of the gap between experiences and the later-learned language, it is possible to displace the critical side of the

superego and use the non-native language more freely. I think this explanation of the defence mechanism residing in a second language sheds light on the anxiety and fear that arise in the process of learning it. Knowing that the unconscious plays a part in learning a foreign language helps in confronting the threats and understanding how scary the task is. It clarifies the frustration and anxieties felt when learning a new language.

In learning and using a second language, one faces the threat of seeming ridiculous and feeling infantile, or of not being intelligible to others. As a result it is not unusual that, both consciously and unconsciously, one resists accepting the new language. Stengel (1939, p. 475) also suggests that “the resistances to giving up a rigid system of object relations” may become an obstacle to the process of accepting a new language when an adult. One tends to feel a sense of shame when starting to use a new language. This can be explained by the feeling of insufficiency (Stengel, 1939). Stengel (1939) explains that to learn a new language in adult life often arouses a sense of infantile helplessness – “their narcissism risks being hurt by exposing a serious deficiency, and usually it is not easily tolerable” (Stengel, 1939, p. 476). For a child a second language may offer another form of play; children are less afraid of talking nonsense and making noise, so the process is a source of pleasure. However, for adults a second language might function as “fancy-dress” ; it is not easy to wear and might cause embarrassment and shame if one makes a “funny” sound in a new language. Such a situation usually activates one’s defence mechanisms, because the function of the superego is to monitor behaviour to make sure that one does not embarrass or frighten oneself or others.

The resistance could also be illustrated with the help of Winnicott's (1960) theory of true self and false self. The mother tongue gives us a sense of congruence and truth, of something that feels "true" to us, while in a foreign language a word with the same meaning tends to feel less true or even false. Furthermore, Greenson (1950, p. 22) emphasizes the object relation between language and the mother, seeing speech as a "means for maintaining the connection with the mother and also a means of becoming separated from her". This view corresponds with Klein's idea that language carries the meaning of separation and also of connection. Children treat words as "objects", and those words are strongly associated with the most important emotional conflicts of the first years of life. When adults start learning a new language, they will inevitably experience a similar sense of "play" with words and imitation, which often does not come naturally and comfortably to adults.

This body of psychoanalytical literature often appears to be very dense to me, but after digesting it, it presents a very profound way of looking at the connection between language and our experiences. The superego functions mainly in two ways. On the one hand, the superego monitors the self not to make a scene, not sound ridiculous when speaking a new language; on the other hand, some embarrassing experiences are released from the scrutiny of the superego through expressing merely in a new language. These two ways are closely related to one's experiences of using a non-native language. They explain the anxieties and shame around using a new language, as well as the facilitation of some painful experiences to be told through creating a distance.

A few linguists have explored the intellectual and emotional process of studying a new language (Guiora, Brannon, & Dull, 1972) and concluded that, unlike grammar, vocabulary and reading skills, skill with pronunciation is unrelated to intelligence. Grammar and syntax are the “solid structures” (like the body) on which speech is established, whereas pronunciation is the most salient aspect of the language ego, the hardest to penetrate (that is, to acquire in a new language), and the most difficult to lose (in one’s own). “Pronunciation permeability will correspond to stages in the development of the ego; in the early formative stages of general ego development greater flexibility is allowed. Thus a child can assimilate native-like speech in any language. Once ego development is concluded, flexibility will be sharply restricted forever” (Guiora et al., 1972, p. 112). The term “language ego” refers to a self-representation with physical outlines and firm boundaries (Guiora et al., 1972, p. 112). Some clinical cases show that patients using a second language tend to talk in a very rational, organized, and capable way, whereas in their mother tongue they are more likely to access messy, childish, and emotional states. This idea resembles Greenson’s suggestion that “a new language offers an opportunity for the establishment of a new self-portrait” (Greenson, 1950, p. 21). The same idea could potentially lead to a discussion of professional identity established on a second language, and the complexity of power and authority in oneself.

In addition, Guiora, Brannon and Dull (1972) conducted a study on empathy and second language learning, in which they proposed that the ability to speak a second language authentically, or like a native speaker, was related to an individual’s

sensitivity to cues in interpersonal situations – that is, his/her empathic capacity (Taylor, Guiora, Catford, & Lane, 1969). Empathy is an essential capacity in counselling and psychotherapy. Therefore this conclusion has the very important implication that speaking a second language might have some impact on one's capacity for empathy in counselling. It thus leads to another important question: "Will a second language-speaking counsellor be able to be as empathetic in the new language as in the native language? Is the counsellor's empathy blocked by speaking a second language?" Here empathy should not be restricted to verbal communication; it also includes empathetic understanding and capacity to attune to clients' experiences (Feltham, 2000). In order to answer this question, I decided to look into the empirical literature on second language-speaking counsellors' experiences to find out whether it was possible for them to be equally empathetic and competent in that new language.

2.3 Modern literature on second language use in counselling

Previously I have looked at the object relation between self and language from a psychoanalytic perspective. I conclude that language has fundamental personal meaning. From here on, I would like to study the way these meanings are played out in the context of counselling and psychotherapy. In this section, I review the empirical literature on second languages and the experiences of practitioners who speak a second language to examine what challenges and difficulties they might encounter and how they make sense of their experiences. This body of literature

comes largely from research in the States on the experiences of Spanish immigrant clients and practitioners, because of the social context and the opportunities to which international trainees have access. It is noticeable that there are two bodies of research, both conducted from the counsellors' viewpoint. The first body of research is mainly focused on how monolingual counsellors make sense of their bilingual clients' experience of speaking a different language in counselling. The amount of research on clients' experiences of speaking a second language has increased rapidly since the 1970s (Ticho, 1971; Marcos & Alpert, 1976; Marcos & Urcuyo, 1979; Movahedi, 1996; Dawaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Verdinelli & Biever, 2009). The other body of research is on how multilingual counsellors' own non-nativeness affects the counselling relationship. Since the 1990s, studies on second language-speaking counsellors' experiences have attracted the attention of many researchers from a variety of fields such as sociology, linguistics and cultural studies (Pérez Foster, 1992; Clauss, 1998; Bowker & Richard, 2004; Jiménez, 2004; Castaño et al., 2007; Verdinelli & Biever, 2009; Costa, 2010; Barreto, 2013; Kissil et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2014). A few large-scale interview studies have been conducted to research the immigrant counsellors' experiences, particularly regarding the main challenges they face. They cover a broad range of content e.g. counselling process, self-awareness, supervision, and culture. I think that both bodies of research provide valuable insights into how using a second language affects the dyad of counsellor and client. Thus I would like to discuss the findings from both sides to assess the empirical evidence on how language affects practitioners' capacity to conduct counselling.

2.3.1 Bi/Multilingual clients' experience with monolingual counsellors

Researchers (Ticho, 1971; Marcos & Alpert, 1976; Marcos & Urcuyo, 1979; Movahedi, 1996; Dawaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Verdinelli & Biever, 2009) reaffirm the results from psychoanalytic studies showing that the mother-tongue has the quality of close-to-experience, whereas speaking a new language may create emotional distance. To place this result in the context of counselling and psychotherapy, they conclude that a second language can better facilitate storytelling, especially of traumatic experiences, by its potential to act as a defence shield against the emotional threat to the ego. Marcos and Urcuyo (1979, p. 336) further conceptualize the idea, proposing that bilingual persons usually acquire a dual sense of self: they seem different when speaking their mother tongue from how they seem when using a second language. Significantly, this implies that the person has a unique relationship with each language he/she speaks, on the basis of which a set of characteristics and an identity can be constructed. This is in line with the findings of psychoanalytic work in the 1940-50s, discussed earlier, and the different “self-representations” contained in languages (Guiora et al., 1972, p. 112). A person’s relationship with the language he/she speaks will inevitably affect the mode of processing and articulating thoughts, feelings and style of interaction, and in turn will often have an impact on the counselling relationship. Pavlenko (2008) further suggests that a second language can be emotionally charged despite adult acquisition when it has been learned through a “second affective socialisation” process. Through establishing relevant experiences with the language, it is possible to develop one’s own or parallel associative coding with that language.

Empirical research provides some observations, and possible explanations, concerning clients' experience of speaking a second language. Firstly, while it is very hard to quantify the effectiveness of counselling, there is no evidence that monolingual psychotherapists are less effective in treating bilingual clients than in treating monolingual clients (Marcos & Alpert, 1976).

What is more, Pitta, Marcos and Alpert (1978) suggest that bilingual clients who can use two languages in counselling may actually experience deeper analysis. Their first language, a more emotionally charged one, can function at a deep level of exploration and expression of emotion, while their second language can facilitate the process by acting as a coping mechanism to allow the narration of early, perhaps intolerable, emotional experiences. By contrast, Marcos and Urcuyo (1979) state that the language conditions faced by a bilingual client will cause difficulty in experiencing certain therapeutic processes such as catharsis. Bilingual clients often tend to put more energy into intellectually articulating phenomena than into experiencing them or voicing their emotions in their first language. It is much easier to keep powerful emotions at bay with a second language. The same result is found in Movahedi (1996) and Verdinelli and Biever's (2009) work: the distance a second language creates often becomes a potential defence mechanism, used to manage/avoid overwhelming emotions.

Language has an object-relational function in counselling and can be used to detach oneself from experiences. The choice of language plays a role in "treatment resistance, tension reduction, ego defensive functioning and manifestations of the

sense of self” (Pérez Foster, 1992, p. 62). The reason, as pointed out by linguistic researchers, is that each language code has its own “stream of associations” between message words and events in the ideational system, and when individuals change their language there occurs the “code switching” process (Edward, 1994, p. 3). This result is welcomed by many other more recent researchers. They agree that the mother tongue has superior emotional resonance, is more affect-charged, as it is learned at close range throughout infancy and early childhood; whereas a second language can be more emotionally detached and create a distance from visceral experiences (Dawaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Altarriba, 2008; Pavlenko, 2008; Dewaele, 2010). This body of research has been conducted mostly by interviewing a group of counsellors, but some studies include the first-hand experiences of pioneer counsellors, such as observational and interpretative cases. For example, Pérez Foster (1992, p. 70) shows that clients can display different personal traits in different languages: “in English, her second language, she is strong, brave, and independent. In Spanish she is her mother's frightened, dependent child”. This offers insights into how counsellors might perceive clients’ foreignness.

Meanwhile, there is an increasing amount of literature on encouraging cultural and social awareness in counselling and the choice of languages in counselling and psychotherapy. Basch-Kahre (1984) has suggested two difficulties that arise when counsellor and client have different socio-cultural backgrounds: the mutual feeling of estrangement “which can be traced back to infantile experience of seeing the strange face”; and difficulties encountered when a subject is not able to use his mother tongue, which may lead to “operational thinking”, namely, thinking purely logically

without feeling (Basch-Kahre, 1984, p. 65). She presents case examples from her work with “Tony”, an African immigrant in Sweden, to show that although Tony’s language is often rich in words and devoid of accent, it is nonetheless operational. His emotions have deep roots in African culture as he spent most of his childhood and adolescence in Africa. Her analysis of the counselling process shows that the feeling of estrangement may lead to the premature emergence of early negative transference reactions, with both the counsellor and the client feeling at a loss due to the lack of non-verbal cues, and inclined to “misinterpret the other’s pattern of non-verbal communication” from the standpoint of their own culture (Basch-Kahre, 1984, p. 61). In this work, which reflects the psychoanalytic point of view, she explains “operational thinking” with a case example that includes her countertransference and analysis of the case. This gives the reader a very honest and rich account, enabling reflection on the impact of socio-cultural differences on the counselling process. These can cause “estrangement” between client and counsellor. They may miss each other’s small non-verbal cues, or feel a loss of familiarity, or possibly misinterpret the other’s pattern of non-verbal communication which differs from that of one’s own culture, or feel lonely, helpless, anxious or hostile because of unawareness of cultural differences. In addition, she explains that “operational thinking” may be a result of language difficulties. According to Fain (1971), operational thinking is the kind which lacks associations with feelings, symbols and memories.

“It derives initially from the Oedipal complex, from the rejection of the face of father because it represents the absence of the mother. The child experiences fear and hate towards the father, who forbids the child’s

symbiosis with the mother, and the rejection of the father as a symbol results in defective symbolisation. This defect may remain in the adult and show itself in a special form of thinking, which Fain has named operational thinking; it is strictly logical and it is a regression to the denial that symbiosis is impossible and brings with it a false feeling of security.” (Basch-Kahre, 1984, p62)

When a client or counsellor experiences estrangement in analysis and takes refuge in operational thinking as a defence, it may make further counselling work impossible. This theory can also apply when the counsellor is of a different origin. I wonder whether there are scenarios in which a non-native counsellor misses or fails to understand a native client’s cultural cues, and if so, how the estrangement affects their counselling relationship.

2.3.2 Counsellor’s experience of speaking a second language

In this section, I would like to look at the literature on practitioners’ experiences of speaking a second language in counselling. To study how counsellor’s experiences, I realise I tap into the realm of countertransference in counselling. Here countertransference refers to the impact clients have on their counsellors, through the feelings aroused in practitioners (Joseph, 1985). Being aware, and opening up aspects, of how clients draw their counsellors into their systems – how they unconsciously act out in transference, trying to get the practitioner to act out with them, and how they convey aspects of the inner world through the counselling

relationship – gradually becomes an essential tool in therapeutic work (Joseph, 1985). Clients frequently communicate their problems in a manner that is beyond words but often can be accessed by making use of the feelings, embodied sense, and associations aroused in the counsellor (Cartwright, 2010). As the counselling relationship is considered the crucial element in counselling practice, I will focus on how a second language spoken by a counsellor affects the counselling relationship.

The impact of second language use on countertransference is first mentioned in Pérez Foster's (1992) work. He, as a bilingual counsellor, suggests that through the counsellor speaking the client's mother tongue the possibility of transference enactments is enhanced. He also mentions briefly his experience of worrying about whether he has "committed the blunder" by spontaneously speaking Spanish with the client, on receiving the client's surprised and fearful look (Pérez Foster, 1992, p. 69). This comparison inclines me to wonder about the experiences of a counsellor who practises in the language of the host country and works with local clients. It is likely that speaking the clients' native language (rather than the counsellor's mother tongue) does not inhibit clients' perception and associations with the language, as long as the counsellor is fluent. However, the author does not explore further the countertransference he experienced. In fact, research on countertransference has received much less attention in the field.

The second language-speaking counsellor's countertransference is closely related to the uncertainties of cultural unfamiliarity and the process of personal and professional acculturation when one practises in a different country. A number of

studies from the US broadly unfold the phenomenon of counsellors' experiences of second language use in counselling, but there is a very limited amount of literature on second language-speaking counsellors' first-hand experiences.

Countertransference in relation to a different culture is discussed by Ticho (1971). He expresses concern, claiming that exposure to a different culture may temporarily impair the analyst's technical skill and empathy and the stability of his self and object representations. To identify countertransference in a multicultural/multilingual setting can be very difficult because a countertransference manifestation is not very distinguishable from general reactions to a foreign culture. Clauss (1998), as a bilingual counsellor, sees the choice of language as an unspoken variable in practice. She agrees that language and culture are inextricable and jointly bound to therapeutic processes. She presents a case from her work as a bilingual counsellor working with a client who communicates in two languages, and suggests that countertransference occurs when she is anxious about the appropriateness of initiating code-switching in a different language. The case material includes the subjective experiences of a counsellor, something which had not been previously discussed openly in the literature. In this context she considers how a counsellor's experience of countertransference relates to the practitioner's language-related experiences. The account sheds light on what it might be like for a practitioner to work in a second language and, significantly, also raises the possibility that a counsellor's anxiety around language can be intertwined with the relationship between the dyad.

Jiménez (2004) introduces his experience of practising in German, a language he made an effort to learn when he moved there at an adult age, and gives us a picture

of how his psychoanalytic work has benefitted from or been limited by the differences in language, culture and geographic origin. He suggests that multilingualism must be understood in the context of a relationship between people. He proposes that “the match” between counsellor and patient is very important for the therapeutic outcome, by which he means “the total interactional nature, the pervasive effect of the inter-digitation of the analyst's character and remaining unresolved conflicts with the character and dynamic struggles of the patient” (Jiménez, 2004, p. 175). Jimenez suggests, from his own experience, that language difference per se is not the problem; instead the therapeutic outcome depends on the efficacy of interaction and connection between counsellor and client. He presents his clinical case to show that the differences in origin, culture and native language between his client and himself were overcome by their similarities and sources of identification; in other words, by the shared emotional states that defined the match between them. Writing about the experience of managing to use his poor German to facilitate the client’s progress in counselling, he refers to Stern’s (1985, p. 51) research on “affective attunement, which involves an encoding into a still mysterious amodal representation” and can then be recognized in any of the sensory modes. Moreover, Jimenez suggests that the crucial element in establishing a therapeutically emotional relationship is basically non-verbal. Therefore, as long as a counsellor can attune with the client emotionally and is able to communicate it, the counselling relationship can be established and maintained, and will be therapeutic. The counsellor plays the role of “translator of the unconscious” for his patient. When there is a cultural/linguistic difference between a counsellor and a client, clients tend

to identify with a non-native language psychotherapist through “unheard-of, rejected aspects that have been set aside and projected far away” (Jiménez, 2004, p. 1374).

He also very briefly refers to an experience of failing to establish a counselling relationship with a client because of his poor command of German. This approach of looking at failures stemming from incapacity for second language use is very rare in the field. From the text we can see that he has achieved many of the therapeutic goals of analysis; he was also an experienced psychoanalyst before starting to practise in German. It seems that despite speaking a non-dominant language, one can still manage to conduct counselling work and develop expertise in this field. This article makes me wonder about the lack of research revealing unsuccessful instances of using a second language in counselling because when I started as a trainee counsellor I experienced quite a lot of frustration in keeping clients. I am curious about how one develops from that nervous and self-conscious state to a competent use of ‘poor command of German’.

Apart from individual casework, there have been large-scale interviews conducted mainly in the US and the UK to explore the experience of immigrant counsellors in terms of personal and professional difficulties and their impact on the therapeutic relationship. This body of research also confirms that it is possible, though challenging, to acquire expertise in a second language and that practitioners develop the competence to do the work. In the States, Castaño, Biever, González and Anderson (2007) examine the service delivery experiences of Spanish-speaking mental health providers by exploring their perceptions and concerns regarding their

competence and training in providing services in Spanish. They interviewed 127 professionals who are all fluent in both Spanish and English. More than half of the sample reported at least some concerns about use of vocabulary and translating technical or professional language in therapeutic work. This study identifies practitioners' priorities for improving training experiences specific to bilingual mental health service delivery.

Following Castaño et al. (2007), Verdinelli and Biever (2009) explore Spanish-English bilingual counsellors' personal and professional language development and use. This to some extent gives insight into the counsellors' subjective experience of multilinguistic practice. The findings covered three main concerns of the participants: their linguistic backgrounds, e.g. being conscious of language limitation in their second language; the professional use of languages, e.g. the limitations of having received training and supervision only in English; and aspects of the therapeutic process, e.g. anxieties related to clients' potential reactions to their language use. These problems included accent; preoccupation with self-expression in English and consequent distraction during counselling; and difficulties with diverse clients' varied use of Spanish in regard to intonation, accent, speed, colloquialisms etc. These findings of problems often create new questions in my mind: "if they are also facing these problems, how do they get over them, and develop the sense of competence and confidence to continue doing it?"

Though the study contains bits and pieces of counsellors' subjective experiences, it does not provide enough in-depth reasoning and analysis of why these concerns exist

in the first place. Each aspect, they have concluded, can provide very rich material to be explored, but due to the limitations of the study this was not taken further. In the UK, Costa (2010) reports a small-scale piece of research conducted in 2009 by Mothertongue multiethnic counselling and listening service with six bilingual and multilingual counsellors, none of whom were native English speakers. She presents some practical observations, exploring the counsellors' experience of "living with more than one language" and applying this in the therapeutic relationship (p. 15). The paper encourages the enhancement of sensitivity in language use, which can often clarify clients' related difficulties and help to establish a therapeutic bond.

More recently, in the US, Barreto (2013) explored the experience of becoming a counsellor in a foreign culture by asking eight participating counsellors to write a description of their experiences as immigrant psychotherapists practising in a different culture. The research suggests that "language limitations neither jeopardised the therapeutic relationship nor did they prevent the immigrant counsellors from being therapeutically effective" (p. 354), which is in line with Jimenez's work (2004). Barreto (2013) shows the positive side of conducting counselling in a different language and concludes that the experience challenges the counsellors not to take things for granted, but "to exercise genuine curiosity, empathise, hold back personal and cultural assumptions, listen carefully, build up an attitude of openness to the new, develop respect and appreciation for difference, to build an understanding of the lived experience in different cultural context" (p. 351). This view becomes more popular in recent multicultural studies, but it often sounds to me very easy to say, than to observe how these positive perspectives present themselves in practice. It

is extremely difficult to see what is taken for granted linguistically as well as socially and culturally. I think only through more transparent presentation of the work people do, will it help us to see blind spots and produce alternative understanding and strategies.

Kissil et al. (2013), also in the US, highlight the importance for an immigrant counsellor of developing richer self-awareness and self-understanding. They encourage counsellors to enhance cultural awareness through looking at cultures from the outside and becoming aware of their “relativity and fluidity” as human creations (p. 139). Exploring the experience of immigrant counsellors, the paper discusses the fact that they do not speak English as their first language, and that they look different or come from “markedly different” cultures. The authors raised the feeling of “otherness”, the part that “overt or tangible” difference may play in a foreigner’s experience of living and practising abroad, and the effect of these factors on immigrant counsellors’ clinical encounters (p. 42).

In the UK, Nguyen (2014) interviewed many practitioners born outside the UK, for whom English was their second language, and asked about their work with English monolingual clients and bilingual clients, with particular reference to the therapeutic alliance. The subject of identification, as the key theme associated with the early mother-infant relationship, was raised. Identification means “seeing aspects of ourselves in others and the ability to identify with another’s feelings and needs” (Jacobs, 1995, p. 81); it encourages empathy and compassion and helps to establish emotional rapport. Nguyen finds that shared ethnicity/culture enables the counselling

dyad to achieve a deeper level of connection, in turn leading to more productive work (Nguyen, 2014, p. 353). Yet there are also concerns about confidentiality within a small community with a counsellor who shares the same culture and boundaries, and who possibly colludes emotionally with the client (Netto et al., 2001). The study presented counsellors with multilayered positions as non-native speakers located in a foreign country, who were counselling clients from diverse countries: UK natives, clients sharing the counsellors' culture/language, and clients from other countries. The differences across situations are not comprehensively compared due to the main theme of identification. This thesis can complement that idea as well.

In conclusion, research over the last twenty years shows an increase in the number of studies on counselling professionals speaking a second language at work. The situation usually triggers anxiety, preoccupation and lack of confidence, but practitioners achieve their therapeutic purposes. The counselling relationship can be established and therapeutic work can be managed even in a second language. This then answers the question of section 2.2.2: a second language-speaking counsellor is able to provide empathy in the second language. This should give many international trainees confidence and the hope that they are highly likely to become good counsellors in our second language.

Studies of bilingual clients usually focus on their processing as a cognitive function; very rarely is attention paid to the embodied process and other aspects (Georgiadou, 2014). This is also the case with the literature on second language-speaking

counsellors. Although the literature includes some work on counsellors' experiences of speaking a second language in counselling and its impact on the relationship, there is a lack of in-depth literature on counsellors' inner experiences. Most of the research focuses on the therapeutic outcome rather than the counselling process and the subjective experience in practice. The amount of research on actual therapeutic encounters in terms of non-native language usage is very limited (Kissil & Davey, 2013). There is clearly a gap between the profound meaning of language from a psychoanalytic perspective and how it acts out in practice. The impact on self-awareness, processing, and sense-making from the counsellor's point of view and the impact on the counselling relationship are rarely mentioned. Within the literature from which case examples have been cited, most of the cases are successful ones managed by experienced counsellors and psychotherapists. There is little mention of foreign counsellors and clients who fail to establish a therapeutic alliance. Compared to my experiences as a trainee, this body of research left me wondering how these practitioners reach the point where they are competent, confident and comfortable with the work they are committed to. Therefore I would like to examine the experiences of international trainees in the following section, so that we can know what they face, what causes them to begin the training, and what their development is like.

2.4 Counselling trainees' experience of speaking a second language in practice

It takes time for a trainee to develop into a qualified and competent practitioner (Clarkson, 2003). Comparing this process to the empirical evidence and theories surrounding successful examples of experienced second language-speaking counsellors, I wonder what trainees go through to develop the sense of competence. Counselling is not only a talking job; there is so much more to it than just words. Language also contains much more than just talking. When the two come together, it becomes even harder for someone newly arrived in a foreign country to enter a profession which involves a lot of language use in a foreign language. Thus I want to examine the literature on the experiences of trainees who practise in a second language.

From previous sections, we see that this subject involves many elements and issues, some of them related to language in straightforward respects such as linguistic competency and communication barriers, others very subtly connected to language: for instance involving self-representation, confidence, and defence mechanisms. It is a difficult task to differentiate common issues and specific issues with regard to non-native language use by trainees. Georgiadou's (2014) hermeneutic-phenomenological study on international counselling trainees' experiences of practising with clients in the host country is a key work on this topic. It gives a thorough summary of the existing literature on the challenges international trainees often face regarding communication, linguistic proficiency, discriminatory behaviour by peers and tutors, cultural adjustment, initial placement etc. Following Georgiadou's research, I would like to first summarize the common issues trainee counsellors often face and identify what the literature says specifically about second

language-speaking trainees' experiences. I will outline the general issues faced by trainees because, in my experience, foreign trainees face the same challenges as native trainees.

Language is an additional element that plays a part in every element of training. Training in the counselling profession is designed to encourage novices to develop a way of being in relationship, rather than to operate according to a training manual (Clarkson, 2003). Firstly, counselling skills are essential but it is emphasized that the trainee progresses from using skills in isolation to combining them interpersonally alongside change (Hill & O'Grady, 1985; Kivlighan, 2008; Ridley, Mollen & Kelly, 2011; Cutts, 2012). This process is particularly affected by a second language because basic skills – paraphrasing for example – involve intensive use of vocabulary. If a trainee counsellor is concerned about his/her competence with articulation, this will inevitably affect fluency of speech, and hence the practitioner's way of being and relating in practice. Secondly, the high demand for personal growth and professional development has been studied by researchers. It is a process that enables the trainee to become a particular kind of person and attain a meaningful understanding of his/her inner self and sustain his/her inner self-image, besides gaining greater awareness of interpersonal dynamics (Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001; Lennie, 2007; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010). Trainee counsellors thus often experience challenges concerning how to be oneself and to be present for their clients at the beginning of practice. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) suggest that trainees often undergo a transition from following instructions – an external and rigid orientation – towards a loosening and internal expertise.

Research also shows that trainees usually experience different degrees of stress in professional development when they start seeing clients (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Bischoff, Barton, Thober, & Hawley, 2002; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; De Stefano, D'Iuso, Blake, Fitzpatrick, Drapeau, & Chamodraka, 2007). The anxiety and doubt about competence and counselling performance is often seen as a hindrance to effective practice (Friedlander et al., 1986; Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). The ability to tolerate, accept and ultimately embrace ambiguity, uncertainty and the unknown in counselling is also challenging for many novice counsellors (Howard et al., 2006; Jennings & Skovholt, 2004). They often encounter moments of stuckness, particularly when facing negative affect and failure in placement (De Stefano et al., 2007). For example, clients' cancelled appointments, no-shows and dropouts result in a dramatic decrease in trainees' confidence; trainees usually need contingent support from supervisors at this stage (Bischoff et al., 2002). Though this body of research does not mention the use of another language, I believe these common issues can also manifest themselves in a trainee's attitude towards speaking a second language.

To conclude the survey of studies in this area, this body of research broadly transmits to readers a picture of the potential issues that an international trainee may face at the start of training. The result presents mainly negative conditions: anxiety, fear and the inadequacy one feels when confronting cultural and ethnic differences, seeking personal and professional identity, and balancing this with academic work. But despite these negative perspectives often found in the literature, Georgiadou (2015),

looking at it from a different angle, suggests that practising across languages and cultures can bring benefits. The advantages of cross-cultural practice are shown in the facilitation of the client's progress in various aspects: addressing difference, promoting self-awareness of clients, establishing connection with foreign clients, enhancing anonymity with foreign counsellors, and advancing trainees' personal and professional development (Georgiadou, 2015). She also identifies the lack of research on the power dynamic in therapeutic encounters. Following her studies, I agree that there is little detailed analysis of a trainee's experience of dealing with clients in a second language. The counselling process in relation to language use is hardly explored. Most of the studies are conducted by means of interviews or journal analysis. There is also very little literature that digs deeply into the specific issue of a counsellor's speaking a second language in counselling and how that affects the therapeutic encounter. There is a huge gap in literature on the transition of a trainee's experience from rigidity to relaxed expertise, and that is what this thesis aims to contribute to the field.

2.5 Conclusion of the chapter

In three main respects I identify the limitations of research to date; specifically, that there is a gap between psychoanalytic studies and empirical studies concerning second language use in counselling. Firstly, what we know from the theoretical literature from a psychoanalytic perspective is that language is fundamental; it is a main part of the construction of self, identity, and style of relating. It has deeply

personal meaning and relational meaning because it facilitates the process of separation and independence. Therefore speaking a foreign language largely affects the person's perception of self and often activates defence mechanisms. This is manifested in recent literature on using a second language in counselling and psychotherapy, in regard to both clients and counsellors.

From the second body of literature, we get to know the challenges and difficulties foreign practitioners face, such as unfamiliarity with cultural differences, struggle with professional identity in a foreign country etc. However, the empirical research has shown that, despite the challenges encountered, a large number of international counsellors are practising in both the US and the UK and have achieved meaningful outcomes with clients. They present their results to make sense of the experience of "foreignness", or in order to improve their expertise in this field. This account of experienced psychoanalysts' and counsellors' practice makes me wonder how they develop competence in counselling work in their second language.

So I shift my focus back to the beginning phase of the career – new practitioners' experiences. Very little attention and voice has been given to inexperienced counsellors who have just started practising, and to counsellors in training, and to how a second language influences the process of developing, learning and practising. There are a very few studies with a focus on subjective experiences, specifically on language barriers creating a different dynamic in practice. From the literature we can see that it is not unusual for trainees to face difficulties at this stage, such as feeling anxious about seeing clients, developing assertiveness and empathy, overcoming the

fear of failure etc. In addition to the common challenges mentioned, trainees who speak a second language often encounter difficulties in linguistic and cultural adaptation to the host country. The literature often encourages cultural awareness, but there is very little mention of how a trainee can develop into a competent culturally-aware practitioner.

Through examining the literature, I find that there is a gap between experienced counsellors' analysis of work and the inexperienced trainees' struggle. Research shows that a number of second language-speaking practitioners can do good therapeutic work; also it is acknowledged that international trainees face many challenges in their development in their second language. Nevertheless the gap between the two phases – how a trainee develops competence and what the development feels like for the practitioner – remains unclear. Hence my research question will be narrowed down to **“What is it like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that second language?”**

With the goal of filling the gap in this field, I would like to explore the transition through which one becomes a counsellor practising in a second language. Because of the lack of literature on trainee counsellors' subjective experiences, specifically on the language barrier creating different dynamics in practice, I further conclude by determining the sub-themes to be:

- What is the counselling relationship like from the counsellor's perspective?
- What is the power dynamic in the counselling relationship like, and how does it change with the counsellor's proficiency in language?

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

After narrowing down the research question that I wish to investigate, in this chapter I would like to discuss the ontological and epistemological positions I adopt and the methodology the research requires. I will start with the ontological stance of this project, that is, the nature of the material the question calls for; then move on to the epistemological position, that is, the way of knowing. Next I discuss methodological principles and argue in favour of qualitative methods as most suitable. After that, I discuss the choice of methods adopted by this research and explain the research design and procedures in detail. I go on to discuss questions of ethics at the end of the chapter.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Firstly, I would like to present the ontology underlying this thesis. The phenomenon researched is counselling, which is a social matter whereby often two people are involved and build up a therapeutic relationship (Feltham, 2000). The research question “What is it like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that second language?” shows that the study is embedded in the specific context of counselling and will research a subjective experience – “the sense of competence”. To actively engage with the context of counselling is to consider the elements of social reality that are involved here, such as the connection

and interaction between client and counsellor, the temporal and spatial characteristics of counselling, the cultural, social and organisational elements that construct meanings, with an emphasis on the process of counselling etc. If the context of counselling is omitted the argument will not be applicable. The crucial part of counselling is the relationship (Feltham, 2000); that is why the therapeutic relationship needs to be thoroughly and closely examined, and why emotions and experiences are to be reflected on a lot more deeply than people normally reflect on other relationships such as friendship or kinship. The very nature of counselling is its immediacy and subjective features as well as its focus on the relationship of the dyad (Feltham, 2000). The research question therefore engages with the essential components of counselling: people, emotions, feelings, discourse, consciousness and unconsciousness, understanding and interpretations, selves and narratives, and experiences.

Accordingly, the fundamental ontological position I adopt is that the experience of the world is interpretable, with relationships perceptible subjectively on each individual's interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). Individuals have different interpretations and they are meaningful (Bryman, 2004). Subjectivity is essential and inevitable in studying human experience in counselling because counselling often works with people's internal perception of their external reality (Feltham, 2000). Ontologically this thesis places value on subjective elements such as emotion, thoughts, feelings, reflections, embodied senses, relationships and experiences.

Based on the fundamental ontological undertaking that subjectivity is, the epistemological question of the thesis is about what counts as knowledge in this profession and how to generate such knowledge. Firstly, I would like to point out that knowledge in counselling profession, which is part of social science, comes largely from subjectivity. The object of research in social science that studies people's experience is the human being in a specific context (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Thus, the fact that human beings can answer back with passion and motivation makes social science unstable, unpredictable, and intricate (Dunne, 2011). The subjectivity embedded in understanding, interpretation, reflection and sense-making count as knowledge in the process of discovering something new in social science (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

In the context of counselling, subjective sensations and experiences are important material that needs to be paid attention to. For example, if a practitioner is feeling disconnected – say, bored with a client in one particular session – it is often an indication that something is going on at that particular moment in the counselling relationship. When the practitioner reflects on the boredom, he/she might make use of these elements and also, through supervision, make sense of what is happening between the counsellor and the client, and then give a possible explanation: for instance the client resists feeling sad by talking about trivial stuff in life, or the client is angry with the counsellor but does not want to show it. There might be many other possible interpretations that are subjective, but are closely based on what is going on in the room and on the counsellor's practical experience. The interpretation does not need to be verbalized to the client, but the counsellor's understanding and awareness

will often help him/her to understand and empathize with the internal world of the client, thus usually helping to enhance the quality of the relationship. Subjectivity also gives voice to different individuals' interpretations. The opening out into multiple possibilities of understanding and interpretation is the thing that is of value to the work.

Secondly, as subjectivity is regarded as a significant contributor to knowledge, the next epistemological question is how we can know about it. The simple answer is that we learn from experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 9) explores the question "How do people acquire knowledge and skills?" and states that knowledge is generated by and accumulated from experiences. He uses the Dreyfus model to demonstrate the phenomenon of human learning. The Dreyfus model shows the transition undergone by people who learn: from novice, to advanced beginner, to competent performer, to proficient performer, and eventually to expert. Novices start by following rules which are context-independent, and gradually arrive at the stage of acting out of embodied intuition, which is highly context-dependent. Likewise, in counselling practitioners accumulate their professional experience through in-person practice and enable these experiences to be researched and shared with others.

"Different from contemporary medical and pharmaceutical industry research in which breakthroughs are made in laboratories and then tested in the field, in counselling and psychotherapy, innovations and new ideas emerge from practice" (McLeod, 2001, p. 4). Diaz (2002) also points out that a succession of individual experiences in relation to others, the way the individual reacts to these experiences, and how one draws one's conclusions, also generate social knowledge. In the

counselling profession, the emphasis on practical wisdom determines that the kind of knowledge we need in the profession is close-to-practice experience, observation, and exploration (Bondi & Fewell, 2016).

In this study, practitioners who use a second language in counselling are the object of the research. To study the lived experience, access is most directly gained by examining and reflecting on ourselves (Bond, 2002). Therefore the research question calls for the experiences of someone who actually develops from a second language-speaking trainee counsellor to a competent practitioner to be used to reveal the transition; and it calls for the details of the experiences to be revealed in depth. Understanding and interpretation may vary according to each person's frame of reference. Relational truth is dynamic and exists only in the interactions between personas and social-historical settings (Lemon & Taylor, 1997). The dyad of counselling actively engages in it and co-constructs subjective truth (Finlay & Evans, 2009). This hermeneutic characteristic, based on the recognition of personal experience as a valuable source of knowledge, aims to generate closely examined understanding and interpretation as if under a microscope. It attends to this close-to-experience feature of research in counselling and shows in depth what it is like to be a trainee counsellor who practises in a non-native language, how the issue is played out between the counsellor and clients, and how the understanding of this issue develops. In counselling the practitioner's experience of clients is an important indicator of the dynamic of the relationship (Joseph, 1985). For example, from a psychodynamic perspective, either clients make use of the practitioner in the relationship through transference and the counsellor perceives it through various

senses such as embodied feelings and thoughts, or the counsellor's countertransference towards clients is indicated, to be further understood reflectively and further explored relationally. The underlying assumption is the recognition that there is always an individual truth that could be revealed for the purpose of being received and understood (Smith, 2015). That recognition will help raise awareness, disclose new understanding, and encourage further discussion and development of research.

In conclusion, the ontological and epistemological premise here is that it is meaningful and significant to examine subjective experiences. "Subjective awareness becomes essential in order to unfold the finding and learning from lived experience in the counselling and psychotherapy field" (Bond, 2002, p. 136). Consequently the insights from practice contain important information that we can discover in answering the question. The subjective analysis of the world can bring new understanding that gives impetus to our knowledge of the world. Therefore, in this thesis, I make it my objective to study the development of subjective understanding and interpretation of the interactions in counselling with respect to second language use.

3.3 Methodology

Given that the materials the research question calls for are insiders' experiences which generate findings from the subjective experiences, in this section I would like to address the methodology this thesis adopts, and thereafter argue for the most

appropriate method for researching this matter of second language use in counselling. Based on the ontological and epistemological standpoint, I would like to conceptualize the methodological argument in more detail. I find Jennifer Mason's (2002) categories of intellectual puzzle in research questions very clear and helpful to work with and to use in reflecting on the kind of question I am aiming to answer in this thesis. I consider that the puzzle this thesis tries to solve is a combination of "developmental puzzles" and "mechanical puzzles"; that is, respectively, "How and why did something develop?" and "How something works or is constituted, or why something works in this way?" (Mason, 2002, p. 18). The developmental puzzle of this study seeks to unravel the transitional process of a second language-speaking trainee becoming a more experienced practitioner. The mechanical puzzle seeks to reveal and explore what happens in this process, in order to make sense of the transition and thus to generate new knowledge and insights. To tackle the two puzzles, I argue for the use of three methodological principles in producing the data the thesis needs: "individual practitioner" experiences, reflexively engaging with data, and context-dependent knowledge.

3.3.1 Individual practitioner's experiences generate knowledge

To answer the question "What is it like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that second language?", I think the method needs to employ diverse and creative understandings and explanations of counselling processes, interventions, discourses, and interpretations (Mason, 2002). These

experiences do not exist in isolation, and they cannot make sense without the individuals who actually go through them. Since previously I have argued that individual experiences are epistemologically valuable, I think it is fair to reassert individual experiences as the main resource in producing data for this thesis. To discover how an individual's perception and account of herself change through time will contribute constructively to a richer portrayal of that experience, in turn generating knowledge from the qualitative data through the illustration (Smith, 1997). In addition, the argument for using people's experiences in social science often encourages greater awareness of subjectivity and appeals for more value to be placed on sharing practical experiences in researching social themes. The field is enriched when it promotes research based on "the discovery-oriented thinking and advocates setting out to explore the nature of what is going on, rather than attempting to encapsulate it in finite terms" (Goss & Mearns, 1997, p. 93-194).

Furthermore, when practitioners devote so much time and energy to their therapeutic practice, it only makes sense to let them voice their thoughts and opinions and thus to allow knowledge to emerge from these experiences. I think that discounting practitioners' clinical experience is misleading and retrogressive for social science research. For a researcher, getting near the practice, learning from the practice, and then generating knowledge from experience is the way to obtain an advanced understanding of knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Moreover, research can play an important role in practitioner development over the span of a career, acting as "a self-renewing counterbalance to practice, justifying and supporting periods of reflection and creativity" (McLeod, 2001, p. 8). Thus in this thesis it is only sensible

to let the second language-speaking practitioners speak for themselves in an enriching way. From that process will emerge discovery of the new thinking by revealing “what it is like”, so that readers can engage with it, imagine it, feel with it and learn from it. We need a research method whereby the researcher can potentially have maximum access to the entire process of transition.

Coming back to the developmental puzzle and the mechanical puzzle which I mentioned at the beginning of this section, to obtain such knowledge requires information from developing practitioners who speak their second language from the novice stage. I think it is most appropriate, convenient, accessible and reasonable for the researcher who has gone through the transition of becoming a practitioner to provide such knowledge with substantial reflexivity and awareness (Hellawell, 2006).

Considering these elements, I argue in favour of using my own personal and professional experiences as the source of data in this thesis to produce first-hand, close-to-practice, in-depth and detailed material on this subject. Observation, insights, as well as examination of the insights are all required of the researcher. This feature of the self-reflexive human being as both object and subject is characteristic of the social science tradition (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 32). I find it helpful to consider Giddens's (1982) analysis of the two types of self-interpretation in social science research. “First are the self-interpretations among those people the researchers study ... The second concerns the researchers’ own self-interpretations” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 32-33). This means that I am to examine my own subjective experiences as I

develop a sense of competence from the novice stage, so that “the researcher’s own subjectivity has become the site of the research” (Bond, 2002, p. 136).

Within the profession of counselling, each practitioner is required to reflect on his/her experiences personally and professionally regarding the therapeutic work, and as a researcher who studies this developing trajectory of experiences I will have available my interpretations of the experiences and my reflections at different points of practice as well as of the research. The importance of reflection as a means of knowing is emphasised in phenomenological research (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Through two different roles, the reflection on being both participant and researcher will yield a close-to-experience understanding of the therapeutic relationship (Bond, 2002). The research will thus produce some conscious awareness of how the issue can be seen and understood (Diaz, 2002).

3.3.2. Reflexivity as method generate knowledge

Because I make the case for using my own personal experiences as research data, the object and subject of the research fuse into one: I am the researcher and my experiences are being researched. To be consistent with the research aim of this thesis, i.e. the exploration of practitioners’ experiences of speaking a second language in practice, an experiential research strategy is required. To link the ontological and epistemological stances of the research and so to generate knowledge from individual experiences, a reflective research strategy is needed as well. I therefore argue for reflexive analysis as the most appropriate research method, for

the research demands a critical way to “examine the impact of position, perspective and the researcher’s presence”, a space to “open up unconscious motivations and implicit biases”, an instrument to “promote insights through personal responses and interpersonal dynamics”, and an opportunity to “empower others by opening up a more radical consciousness" (Finlay, 2002, p. 16).

Firstly, I would like to clarify the definitions of “reflexivity” and “reflection” and the differences between the two concepts. Reflection can be understood as a distanced “thinking about” after the event (Finlay, 2002, p. 532), while reflexivity refers to “turning back of one’s experience upon oneself” as a circular process in which reflexivity bends back upon itself (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix; Mead, 1962).

Reflexivity is a process that guides the relationship between the researcher and the researched to allow for this circularity (Steier, 1991). In research terms reflexivity can be translated as “thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched” (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix). To apply reflexivity in practice requires researchers to acknowledge how they construct their research findings critically in the context of their social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour as these affect the research process (Finlay & Gough, 2003). Finlay differentiates reflexivity from reflection as follows: “reflection can be defended as ‘thinking about’ something after the event, whereas reflexivity taps into a ‘more immediate, dynamic and continuing and subjective self-awareness’” (Finlay, 2003, p. 532). The genre of reflexivity allows space for “intersubjective reflection” in which “self-in-relation-to-others” becomes the aim and object of focus (Finlay,

2003, p. 8). It facilitates the analysis of dynamics between the researcher and the researched (Finlay, 2003).

Secondly, since reflexive analysis involves a radical self-reflective consciousness (Sartre, 1969; Finlay, 2003), it requires me, as a practitioner and researcher, to reflect on my practice, critically examine these reflections, and “evaluate the research process, method and outcomes” (Finlay, 2003, p. 16). I need to re-enter and inquire into the experiences of speaking a second language in counselling practice and come face-to-face with myself in relation to others with openness and transparency (Finlay, 2003). The researcher’s consciousness moves back and forth between self and other in order to observe and interpret; it is a state of attentive dwelling, a deep “relational presencing” through which it is possible to access another mode of consciousness and thus another realm of knowledge (Doane, 2002, p. 94). Through addressing “cultural context; embodied engagement in the events; senses, feelings; thoughts, attitudes and ideas; the choices and actions one takes; values, beliefs and aims; metaphors, symbols, and creative, intuitive ways of knowing”, pictures will be captured which represent experiences, and the meaning-making process of these experiences will be articulated so that conceptualization of new understanding can be achieved (Etherington & Bridges, 2011, p. 12). It is important that one needs time to dwell on things so that deep understanding is achieved and something of value can be generated (McKay, Ryan, & Sumsion, 2003).

3.3.3 Context-dependent cases generate knowledge

In social science, context is a critical element to take into account when generating knowledge, because one person's perception of the same thing often varies in different contexts (Hayes, 1997). In studying human experiences, it is impossible to exclude these variables from research. Context contains elements such as institutions, race, social status, and religion (Mason, 2002). Every individual lives within a cluster of cultural, social, and institutional circumstances. The diversity of the contextual element will impact on people's subjectivity. It contributes to how people think, feel, perceive, and make sense of things. People often have different ways of meaning-making at different stages of life experience. Therefore,

“The problem in the study of human activity is that every attempt at a context-free definition of an action, that is, a definition based on abstract rules or laws, will not necessarily accord with the pragmatic way an action is defined by the actors in a concrete social situation. Social scientists do not have a theory (rules and laws) for how the people they study determine what counts as an action, because the determination derives from situationally defined (context-dependent) skills, which the objects of study are proficient and experts in exercising, and because theory – by definition – presupposes context-independence.” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 42)

Here I would like to assert the essence of context in this piece of research. We perceive each other within our own frame of reference which is unique but is open to change in different contexts. I believe this is the foundation of our work with people: we look at different forms of meaning-making for each individual through that

person's frame of reference. Context helps us to make sense of the behaviour and emotional responses of others. The feature of context-dependence I am trying to illustrate does not mean just a passive and complex form of determinism. It means "an open-ended, contingent relation between contexts and actions and interpretations" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 43). By placing a person against a wide background of historical society and culture, we can see a way of life from the standpoint of one person's vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). For example, an Asian practitioner may perceive using second language as a barrier, whereas a European practitioner may see it as something enriching. Individual perception within a particular culture also varies. The same person may even perceive the same thing differently from time to time. The different perception and feeling make sense to each person. What the researcher perceives in counselling, and how he/she interprets it, will not be identical with the client's experience or the reader's experience, but these differences have roots in context. Bond considers that research quality should not be restricted to "facts"; "the evocative qualities and the capacity to elicit the empathy and critical reflection of the reader" should also be taken into consideration as valid data in social science (Bond, 2002, p. 136).

Therefore, I would like to argue in favour of the use of examples as the most suitable way to illustrate the experiences through which I developed a sense of competence as a second language-speaking practitioner, with a specific focus on intersubjectivity and power dynamics (Bondi & Fewell, 2016). "Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and

universals in social science” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 73). To tackle the broad research question of this thesis, it is therefore useful to put it into a concrete context, into specific temporal and spatial circumstances, into individual experiences and dynamics, because we learn from each single case how to refine our skills and develop ourselves. “It is only because of experience with cases that one can at all move from being a beginner to being an expert” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 222). To discover and construct new explanations, perspectives and arguments surrounding a single case can also prompt the generation of knowledge in social science. As this thesis aims to discuss experiences through reflexive analysis, case studies can best facilitate the process of “closing in” on real-life situations and test views in direct relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 83).

Single-case studies also help to reveal interrelated ideas and evidence (Flyvbjerg, 2001), therefore serving well the purpose of developing a genre of human science which is consistent with its values and practices, including “the idea of human agency, collaborative and dialogical forms of meaning-making, the importance of feeling and emotion, the role of language in constructing realities, the capacity for reflexive self-monitoring, the validity of sacred experience” (McLeod, 2001, p. 8). A close examination of cases that contain rich personal accounts of human relationship should allow a particular or alternative perspective to break through the surface (Smith, 1997). For example, in the beginning phase of my practice, I tended to perceive a client’s glance as rejecting, based on my past experience of a cultural social rule and upbringing; whereas, as I acquire more experience of the new country and grow more self-aware, I can still notice people glancing at times, but the

meaning of the glance is no longer fixed. Instead, I think about it more in terms of a particular client's style and way of being. In counselling, we all enter the room accompanied by experiences and expectations and we function actively in the context of relationships, society, history and culture.

Therefore, to generate such contextual knowledge from learning and practising in counselling, and to unpack a "what is it like" question, I consider the use of cases as stronger than other methods for revealing the "move-in-motion" quality, by offering space for concrete description and in-depth reflection. Case studies can help concentrate the attention on individual experiences as well as on the power dynamic in the counselling relationship. In the meantime, to manage researchers' subjectivity, case studies help to make explicit my positioning and presence in research texts as a witness of myself and others (Crocket, 2014). This carefulness will support the choice of the case study method for unfolding and reflexively analysing the subjective experiences of speaking English, from the stage of nervous "limited working proficiency" (Vanneste, Chiu, Russell, & Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 62) to that of relaxed fluency or even occasionally relaxed clumsiness. The internal world of a second language-speaking counsellor can be created and illustrated more fully with reference to the counselling relationship with different clients. Real, but not identifiable cases can achieve the research aim of keeping close to practice, while the reflexive analysis of issues concerning the language should shed light on the sense-making process within second language-speaking counsellors' experiences.

In conclusion, having discussed the methodological principles of the thesis, I would now like to make the case for three features of my methodology:

- Using my own experiences,
- Using reflexive analysis,
- Working with in-depth case studies.

The rationale of my choice of most appropriate method for this thesis is as follows.

Firstly, because I would like to unfold the experience of developing a sense of competence as a second language-speaking counsellor, the research question calls for a qualitative and experiential engagement. Secondly, my personal and professional experience as a practitioner can shed light on this theme and the experiences gained as an insider allow the discussion to flow. Thus I make the case for using my personal experiences as the source of data. In turn, a reflexive method is needed to examine the experiences and also create space for critical and constructive discussion and the emergence of themes. Lastly, in order to contribute to professional knowledge that benefits practitioners and other readers, I consider it important to keep the thesis close to reality, to practice. Therefore the method must be contextual, in-depth, and spacious, allowing scope for the contrasting experiences of becoming an insider in counselling and psychotherapy while remaining an outsider in relation to the language. For these reasons, case studies are deemed the most appropriate approach.

3.4 Method

In this section, I would like to introduce how I implement the three features of the methodological choice. As summarised in the literature review, this study is concerned with my experience of development as a second language-speaking counsellor, from complete beginner to someone acquiring a sense of competence. Given that counselling training and practice are developmental processes (Hill, Sullivan, & Knox, 2007), I think it makes sense to trace the beginning phase of experiences as a trainee. I decided to go through the process notes I had made and draw upon memories as well. The process note was the main source of data; it included my subjective interpretations and thoughts about the sessions: for example, particularly strong feelings aroused in me, and inspiration gained from supervisions. I did not often record details of the session unless it stood out as something significant for the relationship, such as a sentence that someone repeated a few times, or a random but meaningful gesture made by a client. The process note had been used as a reminder of my perceptions, feelings, reflections, processing and sense-making of things that were significant, rather than a disclosure of factual and identifiable details of clients.

At the outset of the research, I read Greenson's (1950) research on the mother tongue and the mother, it opened up my understanding of the unconscious process when one speaks a new language. After reconsidering the research aim, I arrived at the decision to start with the memory of my first placement. I wrote down the experience of meeting the first client, and surprisingly I found it not at all hard to retrieve the memory of feeling fearful and worried about starting a placement in English: the intertwined fears of inadequate skills and language articulation, the preoccupation

with anxiety in the actual session, the silent awkwardness when I did not get some of the words but felt too uncomfortable to ask, and the disappointment when the client decided not to work with me. Many details of that first session were recalled. By relating myself with the psychoanalytical literature, for example, the shame aroused around speaking a foreign language, it helped me to make sense of the intense experience I had in my initial practice. This analysis was the first piece of data. Ultimately it was not selected, but marked the point where I voice the unspoken clamour inside for the first time.

At the start of data collection, I found it hard to identify case examples. The difficulties lay in the prevalence of anxiety about using a second language as a novice, making it hard to pin down specific experiences that may become relevant for generating themes (Yin, 1994). It was not predictable and the beginning was tentative (Yin, 1994). I noticed that I had changed a lot as a practitioner and even as a person as I wrote about the first session; therefore, I started to write about how I experience counselling sessions now. The difference of my experiences in practice I noticed between then and now was distinct, in terms of not only my confidence in immediate and spontaneous responses, also my understanding of them and the way I made use of my responses in counselling relationship.

As I was writing my experience of counselling sessions, I set about looking for a methodological approach that was congruent with this kind of personal inquiry; it took some time for me to make a decision to adopt reflexive analysis. I read broadly on how to use reflexivity in research and in the beginning, I liked Clark Moustakas'

(1990) descriptions of the stages of research: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination and explication. The stages helped me to outline this process of conducting research. However, I did not emulate his heuristic inquiry eventually, because this study cannot provide ontologically the universal objectivity implied in Moustakas' approach. I could only offer my interpretations of the case examples and be open to the reader's similar or entirely different interpretations. I therefore decided to drop Moustakas' heuristic inquiry and only implement reflexivity as a method throughout the project to position myself methodologically. Another reason to carry out reflexive analysis was that I needed the space and freedom where I could close in on details of client examples and open up on scales of different experiences of speaking a second language (Finlay, 2002). The difficulty with using reflexivity was the actual operationalisation: how to move from the theoretical to the empirical (Caetano, 2015). I could not find a conceptual model of using personal reflexivity as a methodological approach, but there were some examples of using interviews (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012) and auto-ethnographic approach (Ellingson, 1998) which I found very helpful to relate to and learn from. I hope this study can also contribute to the qualitative methodology of using reflexivity as a research method.

Applying the three features of my methodology in practice involved keeping a journal in which to write through my thinking, besides remembering and re-living experiences in an embodied way (Doane, 2003; Elliott et al., 2012). I also noted down moments when the practitioner, while speaking, had a sense that foreign

language use affected the dynamic of the counselling relationship, and I meditated on these moments with relevant theories.

The significance of engaging with literature further characterised this phase. The psychoanalytic literature on the relation between a second language and one's self inspired me to think differently about a trainee's experiences of practising in a non-native language. It opened up another perspective, enabling me to see the defence mechanism playing out and the superego scrutinising myself when I speak English as a second language. The literature resonated with my experiences and guided me to reflect more on my current practice. For example, the understanding that speaking a second language often elicits a sense of infantile helplessness (Greenson, 1950) helped me to understand and even embrace the awkwardness and inferiority that I frequently felt when trying to explain myself to others. This perspective seemingly fused with the speculation that speaking a new language offers a defence against and a detachment from the infantile impulses (Buxbaum, 1949). I immersed myself in these theories and felt both perspectives made sense, but it seemed very complicated to articulate clearly the connections between them. Introspectively I came to realisation that it might be a moment-by-moment experience. I interpreted the theories that, when I struggled to find the correct word I instantly experienced the infantile helplessness, subsequently shame was evoked, and it was possibly the detachment and defence the literature spoke about. In the meanwhile, I zoomed in on this point through self-reflection and I found that there could possibly be an alternative way to feeling ashamed of my unfamiliarity of the language. As I gained more experience, I developed the awareness to bracket the feeling of helplessness or

the coming shame, and redirect my attention to the client. The examination of my experiences through the framework of psychoanalytical theories, to a profound degree, offered me an emotional holding place and facilitated the emergence of a voice that I felt was not clear before.

In parallel to the study, the literature gave me the language that I did not have to reflect on the embodied, unspoken or unavailable to consciousness experiences of speaking a second language (Clark & Hoggett, 2009). It helped me to articulate complex feelings that I could not describe previously, for example the word “preoccupation” on language accuracy gave an accurate description to my experiences, and these words facilitated me to make sense of these experiences. I thus developed more awareness of this connection between the language and myself in practice, making it easier to identify moments when language affects my practice. I noted down vignettes of these moments, and draw upon the feelings and embodied senses that emerge, as well as other verbal and non-verbal features of the context, setting and research process (Elliott et al., 2012). For example, I wrote down the sense that *‘I feel more equal in the room and surprisingly fluent in English’* in my process note with a client who was also non-native speaker. These examples were gathered in my journal and additional case examples from my process note were deemed relevant to the theme.

The subjects of the thesis were these vignettes of moments when the second language was playing an obvious part in the relationship, while reflexive work with the data was changing and shaping my view of the theme as practitioner and

researcher (Hellawell, 2006). These vignettes could apply to any client; at the same time, each client might have his/her unique take on language. This was particularly the case with children. They tended to be more straightforward in expressing opinions. Some children I worked with were very sensitive towards the precise use or pronunciation of words; whereas others took no particular notice of how accurate it was as long as they had no problem understanding. This reflected different attitudes, perceptions and degrees of sensitivity towards difference and diversity in language; these indicated the personal characteristics that affect one's way of facing and handling difference. The differences in clients' response to my consistent non-nativeness in language also inspired me to reflect on how much a second language played a part in each counselling relationship.

As I used reflexive analysis (Finlay, 2002) to work with the data, to examine these experiences and my personal connection with the topic, I found that the process enables me to be more acute. This sensitivity in turn helped me to notice more examples. I then intuitively came up with examples that I would like to reflect upon and investigate. For example, as I understood more about the power embedded in using language and how it could be displayed in relationship, I started to notice the time when I spoke more fluently with some of my clients or when I felt very self-conscious to structure accurate phrases with some other clients. In this process, I developed my own understanding of the topic of speaking a second language in practice and I became more accepting of my non-nativeness, which was one advantage of doing this thesis. I gradually felt more at ease with clients when addressing the language issue in my practice, more adequate to bear the unknown

and allow different voices and interpretations to come out. Research shows that sometimes students experience profound personal and professional transformation through their research because of the ongoing intellectual and personal reflexivity taking place in the process of research (Etherington, 2004). I also noted in my journal this change in myself as it emerged from intense reflexivity and I gathered these insights for further analysis.

The way I selected and worked with the data was a circuitous process and I moved to and fro with the case examples in order to allow themes to appear and put them into categories. After writing down a few vignettes from different stages of my professional development and examining them concerning second language use, I gathered them to compare the similarities and differences of my experiences, as well as discussing them with my academic supervisor. Deeply informed by the training I had and the guidance about how to write case studies run through the diploma, I used the theories from person-centred and psychodynamic perspective to think about the examples I collected with the emphasis on language's impact on me and the counselling relationship. I did this not only because this was the working and reflective style I was familiar with, but also because it helped me to speak in relation to the debate in the literature. For instance, the literature rarely mentioned the failures in practice or clients dropping off, and it did not reflect my personal and professional experience as a trainee, so I thought I should write about how I experienced the failures of counselling as a trainee and as a qualified practitioner. Also the psychoanalytical literature suggested that speaking a second language arousef unconscious defence mechanisms (Stengle, 1939), but it did not say enough

about how it was played out in the counselling relationship, and it said even less about trainees' experience of such challenges and how to work through this impasse. Therefore, with these case examples, I presented my experiences and analysed them through the lens of psychodynamic and person-centred frameworks to see what exactly was making me feel anxious in the specific context. I considered it an indispensable exercise for any practitioner to reflect deeply, carefully and frequently on the links between his/her internal world and actions as a counsellor. Doing so helped the counsellor to gain greater emotional sensitivity as well as dealing with personal issues so that misuse of power or intense emotional responses could be observed and corrected (Heimann, 1950). Introspectively I illustrated the way my anxiety of speaking English played out in the counselling relationship and the impact it had on the relationship. I tentatively analysed the relevance of these vignettes to the research aim. To be specific, I gave an example that I noticed a client who occasionally stammered related to my clumsiness and slow pace in speaking English in the way in which we co-created a more accepting, appreciative and equal power dynamic in the counselling relationship. I then drew upon theories of counter-transference to analyse the impact on me and the dynamic of the counselling relationship when I employed English as my second language.

This transition from practitioner in training to practitioner-researcher changed my relationship with reflexivity itself and this was particularly characteristic in the way I produced and analysed data. To put into words some mental processes that did not take exclusively the form of language was challenging but also rewarding in a way that was similar to a child becoming communicatory and intelligible (Caetano,

2015). My relationship with the topic and my practice also became less fixed and I developed more openness to the unpredictable encounter of contrasting understandings (Elliott et al., 2012). In the beginning, my analysis of the vignettes with the theories was clumsy and I tended to only reflect on my anxiety in practice. I also inclined to see speaking a second language as a barrier in practice and could only be improved by perfecting language skills. In one particular supervision, I brought a case example of a child client who tried to build a “ship” in our counselling session. In the session, I could not immediately figure out what this young child was saying — “a ship, sheep, or shape” and the clumsiness caused a lot of frustration in me. Nevertheless, I managed to redirect my attention away from my frustration to the client and held the session to the end. The discussion with my academic supervisor upon this example helped me to think beyond the dyad. It allowed me and led me to reposition myself as an observer and contemplate the counselling relationship as a third person in the counselling room. This conversation offered the possibility that I did not have to be stuck in this either totally restrained by language skills, or that place of “feeling less anxious but still inhibited somehow”. I could actually make use of the resources as a second language speaking counsellor. The understanding from the supervision tapped into the use of countertransference with regard to language and the possibility of seeing the barrier of language as an asset. More detailed analysis of this example is included in the section 4.3.1. This marked the point where I started to see the issue of second language use differently with a more open mind, and that inspired me to move to and fro on the vignettes as an observer, to reflect in a well-rounded way, and to let themes emerge.

Though it was difficult to pin down something of my intersubjective understandings, it was the opening up to rich and diverse interpretation that truly mattered in this study (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, in the data analysis chapter I presented the vignettes in a disguised form; after each vignette there were some analysis. I aimed to unfold this experience of becoming a counsellor in my second language with real material working with clients, giving first-person narrative accounts to present this transition and the way I made sense of it through detailed analysis. I did this not so much from self-indulgence as from a wish to be congruent and to share something of the process that I think has been at work in forging my own development as a practitioner. The analysis added another layer to the understanding of the counselling relationship, while generating constructive knowledge.

The way I selected some examples to be included in this study over the others was to accord with how representative it showed my experiences of developing as a non-native practitioner. I discussed them with my academic supervisor and I went back and forth to work with these examples. The discovery of the themes reflected the circular process in which reflexivity bends back upon itself (Finlay, 2003). After analysing a few examples, I had an initial thought that perhaps the sense of competency develops in time order. It was not very distinct in the beginning and I noticed that there were many phrases such as “*as I become more experienced, I feel more relaxed about speaking English*” in the supervision. This made me wonder whether the theme was that the sense of competence develops chronologically and I tended to think it was a linear movement initially. However, as I continued to reflect on my current practice, this idea of chronological development did not sit well with

me. My writing of the examples usually highlighted the anxiety I experience and how it reduced as I got more experienced. But there was one particular example standing out and I considered that this anxiety of speaking English came back in an unexpected and intense way in my current practice after around four years' work experiences. In supervision, I discussed this feeling of '*inadequate as a qualified non-native counsellor*' noted down in my personal journal and it turned out to be very helpful to see it and recognise the complex feelings (Elliott et al., 2012). It showed me that the anxiety of speaking a second language was not just something I got over once. I included this example in the chapter of data analysis. The transition from novice did not evolve to the point that all anxieties disappeared, and I felt I somehow knew it and that was why the idea of chronological development did not sit well with me. "The feelings I saw as problematic and tried to repress in fact turned out to be a guide to deeper insight" (Knowles, 2006, p. 402). By confronting such feelings, it actually opened up a new resource rather than a shortcoming. In my understanding, they were not strictly chronological stages, the anxiety constantly lurked beneath the surface and it was changeable with different clients. I then tried to pick a name to describe this fluid, changeable, and flexible state. This process of choosing the right name was testing my English language skill as well, and I was aware that this challenge constantly existed throughout the process of conducting the research. I had help from my academic supervisors and some readings. Klein's theories of the depressive position (1935) and the paranoid-schizoid position (1946) came into the discussion in supervision and the word 'position' seemed to describe more fully the changeable state than my initial idea of 'stages'.

There were cases I wrote and analysed but eventually I decided not to use them because of inadequate interpretation or being less typical. For example, in one session with a client whose child recently died, the disconnection I felt with the client was very strong and I thought it might be related to the lack of articulation. However, after some reflection on the case and discussion in supervision, I considered that sense of disconnection was perhaps more about the numbness of bereavement rather than the lack of language. Therefore, I decided not to include it in this study. The vignettes I wrote down were not necessarily successful ones and I believed that mistakes and even failures could be learned from, reflected on and add value to this field. Inevitably, mistakes and misunderstandings occurred in practice and when we acknowledged them, insights into what clients really need could be gained (Wosket, 1999).

As there was a tacit knowing of the development, I selected case vignettes according to their relevance to it since I attempted to give some structure and organisation to the data I had collected. I ordered these examples in accordance with the theme of development; I also wrote more case examples with the tacit knowing of the themes in mind. In the end, six of the case examples constructed the findings of the thesis according to the themes I discovered and I articulated them respectively in the data analysis chapter. The challenge of choosing the right word was also present when I tried to generate the names of the themes. The struggle during the research to decide on suitable titles with precision and coherence in tense was virtually parallel to the clumsiness and unsureness of articulation in practice too.

After pondering on the most appropriate description, I adopted the term “positions” to articulate the way I understood the changes and the transition. I came up with three positions:

- Worrying and stumbling,
- Connecting and attuning,
- Relaxing and playing.

As stated, they were not necessarily chronological stages; rather, at different stages of professional development, a practitioner was likely to move to and fro between these different positions. Six case examples were selected and I presented two case vignettes with a reflective analysis for each position, and discussed the three positions in greater detail in the chapter of data analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

My overriding concern was to protect the anonymity of my clients. The first and foremost consideration when making ethical decisions was to clarify that this thesis was not about presenting the problems of any of my clients; instead, it was about language. Specifically, it was about the reflective process taking place in me as a practitioner with regard to a foreign language. With this focus in mind, I could use a “moment by moment” writing strategy to produce a coherent account for readers. I decided not to ask for consent from clients but to create a disguise, since I considered it inappropriate and also irrelevant to go back to these clients to ask for consent. The reason was that the language issue was merely a short clip of a session, having no direct connection with the background of the clients. In the meantime, I also

developed strategies for following the principles of ethical research according to the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy, 2010). These strategies had also gone through the University Ethics Committee to ensure that it was ethical to conduct the research.

Considering the principle of being trustworthy and honouring the trust placed in the practitioner, I sought to honour the work that my clients and I had done together. I saw it as a great privilege to be the person my clients confided in and trusted with the things they might never talk about with others. It was rewarding work to witness and accompany clients through difficult times, knowing that they had placed absolute trust in me when relating their struggles and concerns. To write fairly was essential. To disclose the reflective process of a counselling session, or the internal world of a counsellor, was always risk-taking. When I experienced some strong feelings in the room with my clients, it did not mean that they had done anything terrible to me; it was just me registering something important in my countertransference. It was in the nature of counselling work. I kept in mind that it was significant to write with respect and consideration as to how my words might make the readers think and feel.

Personally I considered these four years a really precious period of time with these clients since they were with me while I developed from an anxious trainee to a qualified counsellor, then to a confident and competent practitioner. This journey was significant and personally meaningful. It would not have been possible to be who I am today without having learned so much from my clients. Relationship is essential in counselling, and relationship changes people. I believe that every client I

have seen has registered something in me, and that changes me, challenges me and encourages me to become a better counsellor. Therefore, I wrote with awareness of the great value of the work done with these clients.

To maintain the commitment of beneficence which protects the well-being of clients, I decided to disguise the original material on the sessions. The cases included were anonymized. This also conformed to another rule that I aimed to follow closely, namely to do no harm to the clients I had worked with: or, the principle of non-maleficence according to the BACP ethical framework. After considering the significant impact identification might have on children and vulnerable adults, I had mindfully and carefully edited these materials so that the subjects would not be identifiable either to themselves or to other people. Any superfluous context information suggesting clients' identity was deleted. There were a few practical strategies I used in this respect, so as to honour the confidentiality we agreed on when we embarked on the work together and to respect the meaningful and rewarding work we had done together. I changed clients' background details such as age, gender, ethnicity and specific details of the session. I used pseudonyms. I changed the country that they came from to disguise the client's identity while preserving its authenticity. For example, I might change the country of origin from Portugal to Italy so that a European nationality remained European. I did not disclose the name of any agency and changed a client's specific reason for counselling to a generic state of distress. I also did not disclose whether counselling took place in an agency setting or a private counselling setting, to protect their identity and recognition by those who might know something about the clients.

I think there is a distinction between clients' identifying and recognising themselves in this writing, and I trust that my elaboration and invention had provided the disguise needed to protect their identity, but I was also aware that the research contained enough information, though disguised, it could not entirely prevent clients from recognising themselves from a small piece of their sessions. Therefore, I took initiative to reflect on the possible experiences clients might have when they recognised some similarity of their sessions in this writing. Because of the nature of counselling, clients possibly could not know me as I knew them. However, they did know me as their counsellor and each individual would have their understanding and interpretation of my attitude and skills. This disclosure in research might influence how they viewed their sessions with me. They might read it and thought "That's like me". It might be disturbing, supportive, or welcoming for them. And that might bring clarity or confusion to clients. Reading my anxieties and development as a second language speaking counsellor might provide an explanation for clients to make sense of their opinions of me, or it might entirely contradict with how they experienced me when I was in the room with them. I knew how it felt to feel uncertain about someone's opinion of me. Some clients might feel it was a pleasure to work with me, or a shame that we did not "match" to build up a therapeutic relationship at the time. Some might wonder about whether I included them in the research meant their importance to me. I was fully aware that I had no control over the thoughts and feelings my former clients might experience. Nevertheless, I would like to address here that I mindfully and respectfully wrote with the awareness of the possible impact and the need to protect their identities, and I acknowledged to the readers that

I valued those “successful” or “unsuccessful” sessions as significant and priceless opportunities to learn. I was grateful for these encounters because they made me a more mature counsellor.

Secondly, to all the clients I had worked with, I trusted that it was quite obvious that English was not my native language. I addressed this openly with them, so this written work would not be a shocking revelation to any of them that I was not a native speaker. These examples were written and edited to provide generic examples, yet I tried to maintain some distinctness and realism. For instance, I often asked for clarification of meaning when I did not understand particular words or phrases that clients used in counselling. Clients responded differently to my questions, and the ones I had selected and edited for inclusion in this thesis represented a combination of the typical and notable examples, in order to best illustrate the way a counsellor faced the language barrier as he/she matured professionally. The analysis centred on reflection about how not-knowing the meaning, clarifying, and asking the question had an impact on the counsellor and the counselling relationship, and how it could be addressed appropriately and understood relationally and theoretically in order to generate further knowledge within this theme.

Thirdly, the way I wrote the examples aimed to show integrity and respect for the work I had done with the clients. As I am still a practitioner, the impact this thesis may have on my current and future client work had also been considered in the process of writing. Though I elaborated and invented the disguise needed, the ethical concern was that they should know me and know who I was with them. The research

would impact, to varying degrees, on previous clients' perception of their sessions, on a current counselling relationship, or on how future clients would see me as a potential counsellor, and they might wonder if I would write about any of them in future. If my previous clients, or clients I am currently seeing, or future clients to come, should one day have the chance to read this thesis, I hope they will see this piece of writing as my attempt to uncover the reality and struggles of a counsellor speaking a second language. I had written it with great appreciation and respect for their stories and the hard work we had done in counselling, and with a sense of privilege due to having witnessed parts of themselves that they rarely showed others, rather than as a mere exposure or an attempt to pathologize counselling clients.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter, I would like to unravel, with six case vignettes about six clients from my counselling practice, what it is like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that language. The case examples will be presented according to the three positions as listed in section 3.4 and I use two vignettes for each position. Some analysis will follow each vignette. I analyse the cases mainly from a psychodynamic perspective because that is the vocabulary I use very often in my practice. I also include certain person-centred terms in the analysis and maintain a person-centred presence in my practice since I see myself as an integrative practitioner. My objective is to show what happens to the counsellor and to the counselling relationship when a second language is involved, and how this can be understood not only as the counsellor's personal and professional challenge but also as an interpersonal element offering insight into the therapeutic work. The focus of the analysis follows my research question and sub-questions and it will be based on those perspectives.

- What is it like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that second language?
- What is the counselling relationship like from the counsellor's perspective?
- What is the power dynamic in the counselling relationship like and how does it change with the counsellor's language proficiency?

I will add, from time to time, some personal reflections from process notes which I hope will give the reader a fuller picture of what it is like to be a non-native counsellor in the room with clients and how this issue of speaking a second language intertwines with the already intricate counselling process. I draw on and expand on my process notes and my journal. All quotations from these resources are in italics.

The fundamental assumption I adopt in this chapter is that each client can create and stir up unique and distinct emotional responses and embodied senses in the counsellor: fears of failing, frustration, distractedness, feeling of inferiority, feeling that one is incapable or pressured, impatience etc. (Ogden, 1994). These responses are not necessarily detrimental; I believe that they can often be used therapeutically by means of careful reflection. In this thesis, these different responses are all termed countertransference (Ogden, 1994). The counsellor's countertransference has different meanings in relation to the clients. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the analyst's countertransference is an instrument of research into the client's unconscious. The unconscious perceptions which are shown or partially shown through e.g. feelings, associations, and images stirred up in the practitioner often offer more accurate and immediate insight into the client's unconscious than reasoning (Heimann, 1950). Thus a counsellor's countertransference is not only an important and inevitable component of the counselling relationship; it is also a co-creation of the client and the counsellor, revealing the internal world of the dyad. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the power dynamic in the counselling relationship needs to be understood in terms of the clients creatively and unconsciously making

use of that relationship (Ramsey, 1997). It usually helps the counsellor to understand more acutely the client's style of relating to others and offers exceptional insight into the person's internal world, hence into the counselling relationship as well. This knowledge of countertransference also applies to the field of non-native language speaking in the counselling relationship. Speaking a non-native language turns the counsellor into a special base for the client to make use of. For instance, I am very sensitive to clients correcting my language use and I relate that to power. To develop good and acute self-awareness and acceptance around speaking a foreign language can help distinguish these responses stirred up by mutual interaction in order to receive the client's explicit and implicit message.

I adopt the term "power" in these analyses to refer to a quality of energy or force experienced by the counsellor and client. From Foucault's (1991) point of view power is everywhere in a relationship regardless of its positive (autonomy, self-agency, the sense of adequate control etc.) or negative (manipulative, oppressing, over controlling objects etc.) effect. When someone is in a powerful position, it means this person has the potential to lead or oppress the powerless other. I use the term "power dynamic" to mean the change of power between subject and object: for example, the oppressing energy experienced by the counsellor can be interpreted as resistance transference. This thesis highlights the positive dimensions of power and suggests that one capacity of the therapeutic relationship is that of enhancing clients' power as well as helping clients to adapt to social settings (Ramsey, 1997).

Oppression comes not only externally from social inequality, but also works internally in the very heart of personal identity (Pedersen, 1994). In person-centred

theories this could be explained by the concept of “condition of worth” (Rogers, 1959), meaning that when people internalise cultural and social oppression and the social relationship, it will affect their self-image and self-worth. Counselling aims to empower clients when it acknowledges and works with their internal and external powerlessness. Through the provision of structure, space and relationship, clients gain opportunities to change within a benign therapeutic alliance which is considered the most significant process in achieving a positive outcome (Bordin, 1979). In counselling, through clients telling their personal stories and being heard, being given meaning, being validated and reworked, the process empowers them. The counsellor’s job is to facilitate this process of telling “stories which have not been thought worth telling or have been actively silenced” (Strawbridge, 1999, p. 300) and to respect clients’ capacity to find personal meaning in the way they develop a voice and the way their lives are thereby empowered. Much of the time the change of power dynamic in counselling happens very subtly in the relationship, providing clues through an embodied sense, an instinct, a gut feeling, rather than through a clear verbal communication. The way clients desire power and control derives from and depends on their way of organising thoughts and feelings about relationships shaped throughout childhood. To attune to and develop insights into this will help counsellors to better understand, empathise and start therapeutic work with their clients. Therefore, in examining the case vignettes, I would also emphasise the sense of power dynamic between clients and myself to illustrate how a second language affects the power dynamic in the relationship.

4.2 Stumbling and worrying position

4.2.1 Example: Alisa- the girl who cried wolf

I met Alisa when I was still in training and doing placement. Alisa was one of the clients who came for counselling but felt she was occupying my time undeservedly. She was in her late thirties, had a problem of anxiety since young age. She worked part-time as a lecturer and much of her time she needs to care for her husband who has suffered chronic pain for five years. Because of the illness, they need to go to hospital quite regularly. Alisa felt anxious in situations like going to hospital, fearing her husband may not wake up in the morning, angry and also feeling guilty for getting angry with her husband when a plan has to be cancelled due to her husband's sudden fatigue. She felt that she always needed to prepare for the worst, and sometimes the couple dared not hope for more. It was very difficult to think about what they had lost because of the illness. She was resilient, sticking to the marriage vow they made to each other but at the same time she had a lot of worries. She felt the stress of being "on-call" all the time, felt angry about the suffering of her husband and guilty for thinking of a less burdened life without him. Alisa came to see me with suspicions about how counselling could help. She did not understand the rationale of talking about feelings. She was very acutely aware of her feelings, especially anxieties, and often joked about it. I felt that there was a sense of shame around her feeling anxious. She had been involved in CBT treatment but she found it hard to engage with the treatment. She felt constantly frustrated with the limited freedom and flexibility they had in life. When they had to cancel some of the plans

they had made because her husband was feeling unwell, it left Alisa feeling angry and powerless. She said her husband also felt guilty for being like a burden for her. Because of the unpredictability of the illness, the couple became regulars at the hospital. Doctors could not do anything more than trying different kinds of medication to help with relieving the pain her husband was suffering, and they were so tired of making appointments and going to hospital. And in one session, she described that it felt like the story of “The boy who cried wolf”. The doctor didn’t understand the panic they felt under such circumstances. She was worried that she cried wolf – made emergency calls – so many times that the doctors lost their patience and trust in her. She asked me “Do you know the story?” I said “I’m not so sure”. I couldn’t immediately remember which story it was with this name even though it sounded familiar. Then she started to tell the story and my heart sank a little bit because I sensed there was a moment of disappointment. I was not sure if it was mine or hers. While she was telling the story, I suddenly realized I actually knew the story. “I think I know the story, but we have a different name for it in my language. Sorry I didn’t recognize it in the beginning.” She seemed to understand but as she had already started to tell the story, she continued and finished it. There was a moment when I felt a bit unsure whether I could retell the story in English to her but I knew that story by heart. This doubt made me feel incapable. She finished the story with her own words; we both seemed to understand it. However, the moment was very quiet; neither of us talked. I was distracted by the missed opportunity when I could relate to the story and also I felt a bit disappointed by my slow response. As soon as I recognized this momentary distraction, I turned my attention back to her. I checked how she felt about me not knowing the story; she

reflected honestly, saying “I’m not sure of how you feel about me telling you the story. Apparently you are the professional here, I’m not sure if you feel I’m educating you or intimidating you”. As the relationship was unthreatening, she could be honest and spontaneous with me. I think her response was of frustration and anger but was reflective. This awkwardness at one point made me wonder if I was too preoccupied with getting things right rather than staying with her. We continued our session without addressing the language barrier.

At times, when using a second language in placement as a novice, I feel that there is a constant challenge to understand the entire vocabulary in whatever type of content clients present. It feels like an impossible mission. Also as a novice, I feel, consciously or unconsciously, that I would like to acquire a façade of being more professional, calmer and smarter than I actually am so that clients might trust me more; or in another sense, to make myself feel more confident in a foreign setting. The truth is that in placement it is not possible or appropriate to check with clients the meaning of every word I don’t get. It’s a balancing act. It does get easier as I get more proficient with the language and familiar with the people and the culture. But when I first started, I did not feel at all confident and sometimes even felt scared at those moments when I had to say “I don’t know”. It took a lot of courage to actually acknowledge to clients that I didn’t understand the word that they used. It caused a lot of wariness and stress and I worried too much. Very often I was unlikely to feel comfortable or confident enough to address the situation properly. This was particularly the case when I started as a novice. “Not-knowing” often makes me feel ashamed. It is scary, and sometimes brings a sense of humiliation, but I reflect now

surprisingly those moments are of great value when put to therapeutic use to bear with the not-knowing and learn how to give voice to the unknown and the unspoken (Safran & Muran, 2000). However, if not appropriately addressed, things go unsaid and can often rupture the relationship, leading to negative transference.

First of all, I would like to clarify that, regardless of the incidental differences we have with clients such as native language, ethnic, cultural, social, political etc., there is a shared reality in that we all have the need to be understood and cared for, and this creates the base on which we can work together (Echterhoof, Higgins, & Levine, 2017). I wonder what it is like for clients when they hear a counsellor ask “I didn’t quite get what that word means; what does that mean?” Is it appropriate to ask clients what they mean by a word? Or maybe every client will experience it slightly differently. Giddens (1991) explained that a shared framework of reality regarding people and things is of great importance when judging whether a response is “appropriate” or “inappropriate”. Shared reality is robust but at the same time fragile. It’s sturdy because its reliability is repeated and established through years of production and reproduction, while it’s fragile because once it’s challenged and the sense of existential security can’t be taken for granted, anxiety, which the ordinary conventions of day-to-day life usually succeed in keeping at bay, will easily flood in (Giddens, 1991). From a psychodynamic perspective, the sense of existential security is obtained through a trustworthy relationship between the infant and caretaker, the trust being faith in the return of the caretaker after an absence (Winnicott, 1958). We are built upon shared needs of such experiences. In Alisa’s case, though we might be diverse in our upbringings and beliefs about the world, the fundamental awareness of

being cared for enables us to communicate with each other. The channel is linked, and the reality, such as essential basic trust in people and relationships, is shared by both of us. In turn, it is possible for our counselling relationship to build up and develop. How clients react to the fact that a counsellor cannot understand every word the client says might differ from person to person, but with this shared reality we have basic trust in what we consider important, such as respect, autonomy, mutual understanding etc. in relationships and in this world.

On the other hand, Guiora, Brannon and Dull (1972), in their study of “empathy and second language learning”, propose that the ability to speak a second language authentically or like a native speaker is related to an individual’s sensitivity to cues in interpersonal situations – his empathic capacity (Taylor, Guiora, Catford & Lane, 1969). Accordingly, they suggest that speaking a second language might have some impact on one’s capacity of empathy. I think the two perspectives --shared reality and empathy insensitivity in foreign language-- are not necessarily contradictory. We need to have the same basic beliefs and language to achieve communication with each other, and at the same time we are different in many senses. In Alisa’s case, the client and counsellor are educated in different languages and cultures and possibly with different content. But the story she told – “the boy who cried wolf” –is a shared story which conveys a similar message – if you exaggerate about something too many times, people are bound to become impatient and lose trust in you. What is at issue is familiarity, diversity and creative use of shared materials. Only through experiencing enough familiarity and safety can one possibly face the different and the uncertain (Winnicott, 1974). In this example, the unfamiliarity of a story in a new

language, I was caught up in that moment when I was actually “distracted” by my own anxiety and shame. My empathy is blocked by the preoccupation. As a consequence of my hesitation, I was prevented from being fully present with the client. I withdrew into a self-defensive position and went absent psychologically, though I knew rationally that I should draw my attention back to the client and let go of this part of myself. I got even more caught up as this self-blame over failing to be present for the client. That moment of being “too quiet” involved such intense feeling that it couldn’t be spoken about, not only because of the language limitation, but also because of my incapability to recover from it. It was a case of piling blame upon blame.

It is hard to be creative and imaginative when one’s ease is arrested by rigidity. I slid into a position of defence and rational thinking, rather than making full use of my whole self in association with feelings, symbols and memories. It might have been due to lack of experience as a trainee, or a less than full gaze directed towards the client. In any case, it resulted in some disruption of our relationship so that the counselling process could not be fully experienced by the client, but only rational thinking about her anxieties. I somehow missed the important parts of the client’s story, and she maybe unconsciously transfers her fear and anxiety towards me and sees me as a rejecting figure when she said “*you are the professional here*”. I can see now it conveyed a sense of anger, but I was not “professional” enough to capture the underlying message and regrettably I just left her to it. I missed her non-verbal cues and thus disrupted the trust in the relationship. This is very much like Basch-Kahre’s (1984) suggestion that when either a client or counsellor cannot use his/her mother-

tongues it may arouse mutual feelings of estrangement. Due to both the counsellor and the client feeling at a loss with non-verbal cues, they are inclined to “misinterpret the other’s pattern of non-verbal communication” from the standpoint of their own culture (Basch-Kahre, 1984, p. 61). Language obstacles, such as missing each other’s small non-verbal cues, feeling a loss of familiarity, possibly misinterpreting the other’s pattern of non-verbal communication, may lead to operational thinking which is strictly logical and lacks associational links with feelings, symbols and memories. It is a regression to a place of denial that symbiosis between the baby and the mother is impossible, thus bringing a false feeling of security. If this process of estrangement happens in counselling, it will potentially lead to negative transference (Basch-Kahre, 1984, p. 61). It might be that Alisa found these frustrations too strong to express to a professional, and so she shifted the focus onto worry about me. My insensitivity might also cause her to suppress and block her feelings towards me. I think that, at the moment, I was experiencing the same quality of blockage. I suppressed my feelings of failure, shame and anger towards myself, keeping them at bay so that I could function. But while in that state of mind, I could not expose myself in the relationship and make myself available. While I was worried, there was little space, ease, or freedom for the client to connect to, features on which a counsellor’s creativity and association rely. The situation also blocked the third position in which therapeutic understanding and interpretation can happen. Her feedback, however challenging, was also an opportunity to address what was happening in the transference.

Now when I reflect on our conversation, I can see now that her response can be an opportunity for therapeutic interpretation and wonder with her about this frustration, but at that point of my development I could not access a state of relaxation to do that. In fact Alisa demonstrated that she actually had the same sadness and fear as “the boy who cried wolf”. She came to counselling calling for understanding and help. Underneath these presented issues I sense the conflict about trusting people to truly understand her position, guilt over “needing help” for her husband too often, worrying about whether she was right to call the emergency service. Her self-doubt and frustration about doctors getting impatient with her and her husband, the dilemma of needing to call on the doctor but feeling inadequate when doing so. I feel a sense of guilt now when I realise I acted like the people in the story who did not bother to pursue how she felt when she cried wolf, and why. Due to various reasons as a new trainee, I merely took the story for granted and missed the opportunity to acknowledge her fearful inner child who faced a dilemma of wanting to call for help but feeling inadequate and anxious about doing so.

This case example shows what is going on in a trainee counsellor’s mind. It is not a successful case example, but it provides a clear picture of how anxiety about being a trainee and anxiety about using a foreign language both have an impact on the practitioner and the relationship. This anxiety is mentioned by Clauss (1998), Jimenez (2004), Castaño et al. (2007), and Verdinelli & Biever (2009), but there is very little research that reveals the exact process. I hope this account of a case and its analysis can help readers to grasp the struggles of foreign counselling trainees at the beginning of their training.

4.2.2 Example: Becky- back to square one

In the 4th year of my practice, I met Becky. This vignette came from the first session with her. I greeted her at the door. She looked a bit surprised to see me, with an unusual embarrassed expression and a smile. I had a hunch that she did not expect her counsellor to have an Asian face, disguised by an English name. She was late for the first meeting. I thought in my mind, I need to clarify the time boundary with her when we contract.

Before I met her, I was told by my manager that this could be a challenging client. I felt a bit uncertain what that meant, but thought it would be clear when I finally met her. She walked into the room, sat down, then looked at me still in a suspicious way. There were three chairs in the counselling room. Unlike other clients, she went in and sat on the one furthest inside which didn't face me directly. I wondered to myself, was she just surprised to see me, or was she like this when she met any stranger. That look made me feel uncomfortable as if there was something strange about me being a counsellor there. Or maybe it was just my projection, I think to myself, though I did not normally feel that way with clients. After we contracted, she started to talk about her difficulties as a parent. She spoke slowly and I could follow her pace with ease. I wondered to myself if she intentionally slowed down her speed of speaking so that I could follow her. She was very expressive; she would imitate her daughter's scream, her ex-partner's coldness. That sudden change of facial

expression into the role she imitated gave me a little bit of a shock as if she was mimicking them.

I asked questions while following her story to grasp a fuller picture of her struggles. She said she didn't trust the profession and said counsellors were not able to give a diagnosis to enable her to get more support for her children and herself. I soon sensed that she was a person who was hard to empathise with. The first impression I had of her story was the blame she had towards her teenage daughter for having a mental illness and she really wanted her daughter to be diagnosed with anything so that she could get support from the medical system as well as regaining peace and quiet in her life. Therefore she had received quite a lot of disapproval from mental health professionals who worked with her daughter. I was aware of my disapproval inside, but thought I needed to give more space for more information to flow, and I believed she must have her reasons for being so "selfish". I was also thinking "I'm part of the profession as well. That's a direct challenge." I considered it inappropriate to challenge a client at a first encounter, so I made a decision to reflect her disappointed feelings and fear of being rejected or judged in counselling as well.

The session ended and we contracted. Then three days later, she called the agency saying she didn't want to work with me as I was being "distant and disinterested" towards her. She was not happy to see such a young counsellor who probably had no children herself. I was very shocked by this comment because I perceived myself as trying to engage as much as I normally do. I then remembered my hunch in the

beginning and wondered if it had something to do with her surprise on seeing an Asian counsellor. Would she trust me more or allow more time if I was a native? Or would she continue if I had clarified something around this strangeness between us? The doubts and speculations I had about her all came quite spontaneously and I believe we could never be free from prejudice or feeling judgemental because differences in our appearance and language exist. It is about awareness, and I managed to bracket these feelings and didn't take her side. I am confident that I did what I could do with her. I can't fake empathy, nor can I compromise my congruence to collude with a client. These thoughts do not settle in me but I am aware that I could never know what actually happened.

This example has been excerpted and edited from my current practice. After four years' experience of practising as a counsellor, this session throws me straight back to the position I was in when I first started as a novice. It reminds me of that beginning stage when I doubted myself, wondering whether, because I come from a different ethnicity and culture and speak English as a second language, I could not do the job well. Although after a few years' experience I have learned that the language issue does not necessarily determine whether I can be a good practitioner and the empirical research has shown that immigrant counsellors can be therapeutically effective, I cannot prevent my mind from swirling around with self-doubt (Marcos & Alpert, 1976; Jiménez, 2004; Barreto, 2013). This initial meeting left me feeling inadequate and deskilled and that is why I would like to include such a short clip for discussion. It is related to several factors on the counsellor's side such as ethnicity, age, life experience, language, appearance, skills and presence in the counselling

relationship. It shows the ambivalence of both parties. For the client, the surprise on being greeted by an Asian counsellor was possibly something to adapt to. That experience stirs up uncertainties and feelings of unfamiliarity, even alien feelings, which makes it difficult to build trust right from the start. For the counsellor, it is natural to incline towards self-doubt and wonder about the situation of being a “foreigner”, even if that might not always be the case. I realise that although I am now more grounded in my practice as a counsellor, the condition of limitation and restriction in a second language never leaves me completely. I still revisit that state of anxiety, fear and doubt at times, but the positive side of the story is that now there is a lot more mental space in which to hold my worries and reflect on them. It is more like a state of “relaxed clumsiness”, which is manageable, accepted and resolvable in the session. The focus of my attention in counselling no longer drifts away, nor do I become preoccupied by my anxiety; instead I develop immediacy in order to generate insights into the client’s internal world.

Because this example contains a limited amount of information, I can only speculate on what happened to us in terms of the sense of my alienness, based on my experience as counsellor in this specific session. I am aware of how easy it is for me to see this session as a total failure on my part, rather than as a fair encounter that required engagement by both parties. There are a few points that I would like to address and analyse. Firstly, our initial impressions of each other, which created an unspoken dynamic in the room; secondly, my interpretation of the session based on my understanding of the initial meeting, that is, the negative transference that took place between us; lastly, how, throughout the whole session, my psychological

conflict between anxiety and firmness affected my clinical capacity and judgement, and how that gives a clue to what was going on in the client's internal world.

Throughout the session, I had a strong conviction that I was feeling disapproval while listening to her. On the one hand, I cannot help agreeing with the other professionals that perhaps the client's mental health difficulties cause her children to experience some mental health issues. On the other hand, I cannot approve of myself when thinking and feeling that way about a client who has her struggles. I find it hard to justify it and to combat the thought that I am being judgemental and cannot empathise with her. I believe a negative countertransference is taking place between us.

Though reflection on my work in supervision, I have a sense that it is more likely that she not only receives a lot of disapproval from other people, but internally experiences very strong self-disapproval which she cannot consciously allow herself to experience. It is as if the disapproval is already inside her and it is very real for her, and I experience that for her because it is too threatening to even allow the possibility of self-approval to exist. I speculate that perhaps I experience projective identification as well and feel inadequate about myself being a foreigner in a local agency (Bion, 1959; Cartwright, 2010). On the basis of previous occasions, she might already be too scared to hear the same thing from another professional such as me; therefore she strictly rejects that thought right at the beginning, so that even a tiny bit of doubt from me is not allowed. I interpret that she unconsciously projects this internal disapproval onto me. She cannot allow that part of her to be touched or

even seen by me, and thus creates a distance by choosing the chair which does not face me and disparaging my profession to my face in the first session. In this way, she can keep the threat at bay and hold herself together in counselling (Bion, 1959). From her narrative, it seems that counselling is a place where she needs to find the rare quietness and peace which she has lost in her chaotic, noisy and dramatic family. I feel she shuts me out of raising the possibility of disagreement. I think that is why I feel so conflicted by the two judgemental voices. This leads me to ponder on the possibility of ethnic and cultural differences.

I was directly challenged and silenced by Becky's comment about the counselling profession being useless and unhelpful. Though I am no longer a novice, it stirs up anxieties and doubt in me, especially when I truly feel that it is difficult to empathise with her. I have doubts about whether I am being judgmental and tell myself to bracket my feelings of disapproval towards her and maybe discuss them in supervision. I think that if my instinct is true, then this is a very good demonstration of unconscious communication in which I feel the unbearable disdain she experiences towards herself and which was projected onto me (Bion, 1959). I try to shake it off because it feels unpleasant and wrong when a counsellor is clearly judgemental and critical towards his/her client. But by trying to get rid of the judgemental feeling, I lost the already hard-to-reach contact with her internal world. I believe that when clients talk about other people in counselling, they might as well be speaking about me, and our here-and-now relationship. Becky makes it clear that none of the professionals she has met have been helpful in her situation. How I interpret this is that she needs to be heard and is very anxious that I, too, will fail to

understand her. Though the challenge is presented in a rough manner, it shows her strong urge to be understood.

By contrast, the lesson that I have learned is that if I do not allow myself to experience the sense of feeling wrong and judgemental, but get caught up in my conflict about being judgemental, I will actually be rejecting Becky's effort to make use of me in counselling by letting me own that bit of her and being understood by me. I will miss her completely in the session. Rogers (1987, p. 114) states that "a counsellor's failure lies in making the mistake of not remaining open to the possibility that the client may well have further issues to disclose as the counselling proceeds and may need some help in making these disclosures". To remain open to all the possibilities rather than coming to a conclusion too early is crucial in counselling. To close up the channel for challenge and risk-taking is to silence the client against further exploration and deeper realisation. It is not easy to be challenged brutally. The anxieties and even the thought of being a second language-speaking counsellor can create a potential obstacle to the therapeutic use of self (Buxbaum, 1949; Greenson, 1950). This is because the self is so bound up in language (Balkanyi, 1964). The ideas of prejudice, stigma, race and normality are embedded in oneself, and could be triggered by an unpleasant look or a hint of self-doubt. They are not provable and call for acute awareness.

Researchers such as Basch-Kahre (1984), Fuertes and Brobst (2002), Bowker and Richard (2004), and Kissil et al. (2013) have discussed the challenge of ethnic, racial, and cultural difference in counselling but there is very little research that

reveals the experience of being an “outsider” in the counselling profession. It is gradually becoming a very sensitive topic and has gone unspoken in recent years with the growth in promotion of ethnic equality. This is a positive change, but I think addressing difference is important and that, by acknowledging it, we realise how much in common we have as human beings. Race difference is evident if the counsellor comes from a minority ethnicity in the country. Different appearance and accent will not go away. The awareness needed to address the difference at an appropriate time therefore lies with the counsellor’s judgement. If it goes unspoken as happened in the example, the sensitivity and tension of the race issue will intertwine with clients’ internal conflicts, and the dynamic in the room will become more complicated and hard to clarify.

Though cultural or ethnic differences are very obvious and relevant, I do not intend to spread the analysis too widely on these effects. I will keep my focus on language and the counselling relationship. The self-doubt around being a non-native counsellor has been a vulnerable part of me, creating a bait which is the more easily hooked by what the client brings to counselling. Without this awareness of my vulnerability, I would see this client as someone who was prejudiced against my race in this profession. But that might not be the case, if I think of it from a relational perspective. I speculate that it might be the disapproval of herself that Becky projects onto me; then the vulnerable part of me gets hooked and identified with this disapproval. To open up discussion of the possibility of projective identification, I feel this initial encounter between us makes more sense to me. Even though it is impossible to verify the speculation, unconscious communication happens right from

the first moment we see each other (Ogden, 1992). The insight into and self-awareness of doubt and critical comment can veer away from pure confusion and offer a way to make sense of the whole story. It lets me as the counsellor learn a lot about how the internal world of the client bridges with the outside world and how transference and countertransference could work so subtly in the relationship. It cannot be denied that it is still a case of failure, but many mistakes are inevitable, and they provide priceless lessons for a counsellor's further and more mature development. It is often these mistakes and misunderstandings that truly reveal the client's need (Wosket, 1999).

4.2.3 Discussion

It is well acknowledged and commonly believed that speaking a second language in counselling adds more weight to the already intense experience of being a beginning counsellor in practice (Georgiadou, 2014). Many trainee counsellors harbour the suspicion that speaking a second language at work is a shortcoming, like a constant shadow, and somehow creates a massive gap that seems impossible to bridge. Most modern research on second language use in counselling has touched on this condition of anxiety, restraint, and limitation (Chen, 1999; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Morris & Lee, 2004). The anxiety about making mistakes is usually intense, accompanied by preoccupation on skills such as reflection, paraphrase, interpretation and process thinking. This also includes adaptation to a counsellor's role (Hill, Sullivan, & Knox, 2007). To do many different tasks at the same time is a great challenge for many trainees, but it also gives insight into the practitioner's strengths and deficiencies, as

well as inner space for handling diverse situations. For second language-speaking trainees, language itself may seem like a constant over-arching problem, an impossible chasm to stride across; however, as they gain more experience in clinical work in their second language, they develop a stock of vocabulary and phrases in the second language. For me it is important to develop a set of words and phrases with which to ask questions in a way that is culturally appropriate and considerate. Some words for feelings such as “strength” I think express perfectly what I mean, while I don’t have equivalent words in Chinese that are as concise. The language the training takes place in will inevitably affect the counsellor’s professional language use and self-demeanour as a practitioner (Verdinelli & Biever, 2009). From the literature, we see that speaking a non-native language increases the complexity of progressing intellectually and emotionally, especially when a trainee also experiences cultural shock in the host country.

In the first two years of starting practice as a trainee, the thing I worried about most before seeing clients was whether I could understand their English. The constant self-doubt and self-questioning inhibited my ability to relax the mind and body. I wrote in my journal “*What would I do if I don’t know the words they say*”; “*What if they see I am an Asian and feel strange about it*”; “*What if they think I’m too inexperienced*” etc. All these “what ifs” show that my greatest insecurity as an inexperienced trainee resided in the fear of failing.

The first question expresses my biggest fear. The questions I listed above may be quite different from what native trainees would ask before their first session with a

real client. Or maybe even native trainees experience these anxieties regarding a different accent, class, or appearance. It does not mean that second language-speaking trainees do not worry about their clinical capacity or skills in practice, but it shows that language plays a dominant part in every other thing that they worry about; it permeates all their thoughts and feelings. This pervasive anxiety, stemming from uncertainty, is captured and recognised in literature (Hill et al., 2007). The uncertainties come from the experience of difficulty in being understood by others – an infantile fear (Klein, 1923) – rather than a fear of being unprofessional. These anxieties will inevitably influence a counsellor’s psychological stability, as they are primitive and fundamental. A new language challenges the robustness of one’s self, as if one needs to re-establish a new sense of self in this new language. This usually leads to the preoccupation with language for new practitioners. As a result, the preoccupation will influence the concentration a counsellor can offer clients, and in turn, will affect the establishment of a therapeutic relationship. Language is essential for appropriately addressing the “not-knowing” as well as what it is like to “not know” something. This is the double-layered difficulty I mentioned in section 2.2.1— the challenge to feel “not-knowing” and the challenge to communicate that “not-knowing”. It is not only about the right articulation; it is about a lack of the sense of competence.

The second doubt reveals that race and ethnicity play a part in counselling. As multi-linguistic and multicultural counselling become more prevalent, research on counselling and psychotherapy has placed some emphasis on this area. I do not aim to dig deeply into this subject, since the focus of this thesis is on language use.

However, elements such as appearance and cultural upbringing of different races need to be taken into consideration and addressed, as unfamiliarity with these may cause estrangement in the counselling relationship, so that differences increase the potential for uncertainty and distrust. It is of great value when practitioners develop the humility, robustness and discipline to recognise their inevitable “state of openness and receptivity” to another person's life and retain their curiosity about differences (Dyche & Zayas, 1995, p. 389).

The third doubt shows fear and reluctance to accept myself as an inexperienced novice. This process often challenges me to look at myself in a new way, to confront the shame and powerlessness felt when I have no control over others, to give credit to myself, to give space and acceptance to the inner voices and, most importantly, to learn to see the world through other people's lenses. Research shows that trainees often experience challenges concerning how to be oneself as well as practise essential counselling skills in placement (Hill & O'Grady, 1985; Ridley, Mollen & Kelly, 2011; Cutts, 2012). Like many beginners, the main element in my reflections on early practice was the self-critical voice which expresses lack of confidence as a second language-speaking trainee. Counselling seems to impose a weight that is difficult to balance. If you try too hard, you will probably miss the client. It stirs up the self-doubt that I do not have enough skill to satisfy others; but in the meantime I challenge the doubt too. I started to discover and give credit to my inner resources, the desire to engage, the interest in listening and the willingness to learn. The emotional disturbance about beginning and about the second language leads me, in a positive way, to examine what is behind my desire to be a helper, whether I am

seeking approval or a deeper connection which hasn't been met by my upbringing. Hycner (1991) talks about the danger of practitioners being too "intelligent", with too many thoughts going on within us and little internal space to receive the client's "newness, uniqueness and otherness" (p. 99). This was particularly the case when I started. I found a lot of questions going on in my head but I couldn't ask them properly in time. This was not only because I had not yet developed a counselling vocabulary; it was also due to intense internal conflict and lack of ease in my questioning skills, lack of softness, the clumsiness, and occasional blankness. It took me some time to come to terms with the fact that I could be truly helpful by letting go of myself, of the need to feel helpful, of the critical voices etc. Wosket (1999) talks about the therapeutic use of self which, in my opinion, contains something subtle and significant that language cannot fully describe; it is more like an embodied knowledge and expertise. The powerful strategy mentioned by Wosket (1999) – immediacy – is quite hard to achieve due to language proficiency, practical experience and clinical judgement, when anxieties are nagging me at the same time. Only through repeatedly experimenting with different uses of self in practice – setting out somewhere and keeping on practising, reflecting and making sense of the experiences – do I start to get a sense of what is meant by "emerging as a therapeutic self" with the capacity to feel, to think and to communicate in the immediate moment while listening in a non-native language. As Carl Rogers says, it is not about doing; it is the way of being that matters (Natiello, 2001).

The importance of Becky's example is that through it I realise the anxiety of speaking a second language does not leave me entirely as experience accumulates as

far as I can speculate within the scale of this thesis. I am thrown back to the position when I was a novice. The anxieties and fear feel raw and profound. I feel little and paralysed in the session; I feel disappointed and self-doubt after the session. I would like to reassert that because this has not been mentioned in the literature. It possibly gets immersed in the amount of research on cultural diversity and adaptation and no researcher has examined it from a developing angle. I hope this case can help the reader to see that despite a sense of competence, the anxiety of speaking a language can easily bring one back to a stumbling place.

I conclude this position as “Worrying and stumbling” in the development of a counsellor working in a second language. I use the cases to show how the struggles play out in two case vignettes, as well as what can be learned from the difference between counsellor and client when the establishment of relationship gets difficult. The example of Alisa illustrates estrangement in the counselling relationship because of different backgrounds and upbringing. The trainee’s preoccupation and insensitivity towards the client’s need could lead to a premature ending. The recent work with Becky shows the complexity of the language issue in the context of the cultural and racial domain in counselling. Difference stirs up uncertainty and in this sense the position of “worrying and stumbling” never entirely leaves the second language-speaking counsellor, despite them having gained more experience. The fear of incapability still visits the counsellor at times.

4.3 Attuning and connecting position

4.3.1 Example: Callum- a Scottish-born Czech boy

Part A

7-year-old Callum was born Scottish, but his parents were both Czech, and he spoke English with an accent. When I saw him in counselling, there was a crisis in the family. He was taken away from his biological parents due to neglect in the family. Social workers intervened and moved him to temporary foster care. In the meantime, his parents, especially the father, were seeking help to make a change for the family. The first impression I had of him was that he was a bright boy with a good sense of humour, but he was very desperate because he missed his parents a lot. He wanted to go back to his family, though his parents were divorced and no longer lived together. Callum tried in every way to ask if anyone could help him return to his own family; he was in quite an anxious state. He had a history of being neglected at home, and when he came to the play room for counselling, he looked overwhelmed by the many toys and materials there. When we started the work together, he was very good at making a mess with finger painting in the room. It was very difficult for him to leave the counselling room and he pushed the time boundaries a lot.

This session happened in the 7th week with Callum. He was trying to make a ship in the room with clay. I asked what he was making: “a ship”. I was not very sure of the word “ship”, and was thinking “shape”, “sheep”, or “ship”. I checked with him,

and he kept saying “a ship”, but I still wasn’t sure which one he meant. Then he threw the clay on the table, annoyed. “Why do you keep annoying me?” He got angry from frustration. He stopped doing the clay, looked down and fell silent. I was surprised to see him like that and it got me very frustrated as well because I didn’t get the word right in time. I answered him cautiously, “I’m sorry if I annoyed you. But I didn’t get the word ‘ship’ (I still hadn’t got it then). I didn’t intend to annoy you but you know I’m not Scottish, I’m from another country. I have an accent and you do too. Sometimes I might not understand or even misunderstand you. But I really want to know what you are making.” His head was still lowered; he was holding his breath. He was still annoyed, but I could see he was not so angry now. I knew he had taken in what I said. He had a very good capacity for speaking and understanding English, even with me who spoke English with an Asian accent. We were quiet for a few seconds. “Breathe, Callum, you are holding your breath,” I said with a gentle voice. He soon realized he was holding his breath when he was annoyed, and maybe also found that amusing. “How do you know that I’m not breathing?” he asked curiously with a smile on his face: so quickly did his mood change. “Because I can’t hear it,” I said. Then he started intentionally and playfully holding his breath to see if I could notice it. The atmosphere became softer and more soothing. We continued playing with the clay.

Part B

Then he asked me where I come from. I told him “China” and he said his family were from Czech Republic, and he spoke two languages. “Me too, I speak two

languages as well,” I said tentatively. He seemed happy with the connection we had. I eventually understood the idea that he was making a “ship” when he was trying to put a sail on it. He couldn’t find the word. He explained “It’s something on the ship that is big and goes with the wind.” I knew what he meant, but I couldn’t immediately provide the word either. So I told him “I know what you mean, but I don’t know the English word for it either. Instead, I do know the Chinese word for it.” He then asked me what it was. I said “fan(-)”. He smiled and said “Fun or fan”. He was making a joke of the pronunciation, bringing unique language humour into the room. He seemed happy with the fact that neither of us knew the word in English, but both of us knew it in our mother tongue, and that was good enough to enable us to make the connection. It was such a subtle connection that only bilinguals experiencing a second language barrier could understand. Though the first attempt to connect failed, two different persons still managed to connect in the end through something we did not know how to say, but knew what it was in our shared reality.

At the end of that session, he helped me clean up the room. He was very helpful and engaging that day unlike his usual protest against leaving. I could not put my finger on what actually happened between us, but it seemed that by revealing the fact that there were things we did not know, it was OK. We still got to understand each other and build a unique connection, and that per se was an important moment in our work.

It is not unusual that children find it difficult to put their feelings into words, either due to limited vocabulary, or because they are unaware of the feelings that drive

them to act out in play, artwork, or relationships. The two languages that Callum speaks almost represent his two worlds: one is his core family who do not speak English at home; the other one is the surroundings where he has to fit in, e.g. school, social work, foster care, friends etc. He is torn between the two and he is also the bridge between the two. He loves a good story but finds reading English very hard. None of his immediate family could read English. He tells me his feelings straightforwardly in English; however, I doubt that he could speak so openly in his mother tongue. There is a very subtle connection regarding language for us to work on together. I have worked with other adult clients who speak English as their second language, and it creates a subtly “equal” dynamic in the room. This makes me feel that the mistakes around language can be accepted more easily.

Working with children is a bit different when it comes to language as well, because of their limited vocabulary. Previous literature has suggested that we learn our language through our experience of being contained by significant others in our life. The sound starts to seep into our body or is sublimated so as to represent itself, through our repeatedly hearing it as we experience things (Klein, 1923). Children possibly pick up a word and use it without knowing what it means to them or to other people. Staying with children’s reality then becomes very important. The unconscious will be communicated by the children to the counsellor, though not necessarily verbalised in language, through transference in the counselling relationship. It is significant that the counsellor pays attention to the feelings that the child displays as regards relating, and at the same time does not collude with those feelings, or intrude on the child’s inner space (Hopper, 2007). Children need to be

noticed and seen so that they can develop a sense of self, existence, value and self-importance (Winnicott, 1971). Thus in counselling, where such an ideal setting is provided, the child needs to feel and to know that somebody is there to receive his message, and to help him face it and make sense of it, rather than dismissing it as other adults do (Hopper, 2007). I think that in Callum's case he values the psychological contact and boundary of the place very much, judging by how he pushes the boundaries nearly every week. He needs to be held and contained gently and firmly. Containment involves a sense of finding sanctuary and seeking meaning, and it is done by putting a boundary around a disturbing experience in order to make it less disturbing (Hopper, 2007, p. 44). Through accumulated experience of being held and contained, the baby will grow internally a space for him/herself, thus becoming his/her own containment (Winnicott, 1971).

When Callum did painting he used all the material, and always left such a tremendous mess for me to clean up that sometimes I would leave with my clothes full of paint and sand as well. He uses a lot of strength whenever he plays with things, and always enjoys a fight or a kick at the cushion. I soon understand that he finds it hard to balance his strength and anger. When children grow up without enough "consistent sanctuary or empathetic response", they may come to lack the sense of a secure pattern in life, or may be left feeling that anything could happen (Hopper, 2007, p. 44). He needs to be given space for the frustration. He has had a lot of loss in the past two months and it is understandable how overwhelming it must be for a seven-year-old to experience that. He is still in a very unpredictable and powerless situation, not knowing whether the separation will be prolonged. He is

holding a lot inside him, and has to behave properly so that, in his mind, his good behaviour might help him to be able to return to his family. He needs to let the emotion out, but school is not always the suitable place and he might get into trouble for it, even though teachers take his special circumstances into consideration. He doesn't yet know how to contain his emotions. From what I see of his family, he has very few resources with which to learn about boundaries, as he is neglected most of the time. In counselling, it is crucial and sometimes extremely emotionally demanding for me to gently refuse his requests and stick to the boundary so that he can hear that clearly and feel its firmness and security without being swung into uncertainty. By setting boundaries firmly, the counsellor creates the possibility of a sanctuary and that communicates the concern and care the counsellor has for the child and his problem (Hopper, 2007). These techniques and principles need to be communicated effectively and gently to him. They demand a gentle way of using language as well as the ability to communicate empathy with his frustration. When I annoyed him in the room, it showed a common misunderstanding of pronunciation which sometimes would happen to me outside counselling too. Despite using a second language, the way I deal with the situation could facilitate the therapeutic process by enhancing the counselling relationship, and that is what I would like to focus on. In Callum's case, to receive his "annoyance", without dismissing the language barrier, is constructive for our relationship. Considering the way we relate to each other, I give Callum unconditional positive regard and empathy with the annoyance he experiences, as well as maintaining my own stand. I do not withdraw from our contact; I face his feelings directly, accept that it is natural and understandable, and gently hold his feelings in the room. He then knows that I hear

him and take his feelings seriously. In the meantime he can have the space he needs and can make use of our relationship to get in touch more fully with his emotions. I own my feelings and I hold his.

More importantly, after a year of experience as a trainee counsellor, although I feel disappointed and annoyed about failing to understand his word, I do not slide into self-criticism about being an incapable non-native speaker, or frustration over not getting things right. Instead, by clarifying the reason, I help both Callum and myself to face the fact that miscommunication is manageable in a safe and congruent manner, and is no longer unspoken or unacknowledged. He could experience the “holding” I maintain for him and also for myself. By acknowledging my apology for not understanding his words, I also explain to him that the reason I keep asking is my desire to know more about him, my interest in engaging in the relationship with him, and my interest in the value of his existence. Callum’s frustration suggests a sense of being very powerless at times. Considering his family situation, it is not hard to imagine the lack of stability and control in his hands. He says many times that he wants to go back to his parents but these words often go unheard or underestimated. He usually says “Nothing in this room is working” when the glue or scissors don’t work properly. By this, he means that the mechanism is not working just as his strategies are not working in his circumstances. The disappointment and anger towards everything need to be recognised and acknowledged, not only concerning the actual thing which is not working such as the scissors, but concerning the sense of control and autonomy that his inner being is crying out for. By experiencing a sense of being understood and recognised as who he is, and exploring why he

behaves in a certain way when miscommunication happens, he can learn about congruence, and that brings changes creatively rather than keeping him statically in those circumstances.

I believe that children bring to the sessions “the contents from another place and try to make them fit” (Hopper, 2007, p. 41). They stick to their way of relating to others outside the counselling room, and it usually seems impossible for them to imagine that they could possibly relate to people in a different way. Counselling provides a space where children can experiment with new ways of relating when their anxieties diminish. In this case example, gradually I manage to lead both of us to step out of that frustration by observing and reflecting on something I see about him – he is holding his breath. He is not aware that he is doing that. The bodily response is very spontaneous and subconscious. Breathing is a human being’s most fundamental need; holding the breath leads to lack of oxygen, and in turn to a place with no supply of the essentials of life. This emergence of spontaneous breathing or not breathing, in my interpretation, reveals the urge to control the pain of living and relating (Totton, 1998). To Callum, the pain of not being perceived correctly feels very real. I think he is very alert to what I might say to him in that situation. It seems that my response, when I noticed him holding his breath, was very different from what he expected of adults. I did not get angry or retaliate in response to his annoyance; I did not withdraw, nor did I panic, or become frightened by his anger. I noticed the change and reflected that awareness to him, and in so doing, helped him to notice and contain his embodied response of anger. Thus we could both wonder about his reaction of being annoyed and try to find a way to soothe him in similar

circumstances. The counselling relationship is essential for enabling me to do that. By noticing him, I change the dynamic of our relationship as well. The relationship enables both of us to give space to our inner conflicts, so that our feelings can be displayed and transference can come to the surface. I function like a mirror reflecting who he is: he experienced himself as all over the place, in bits and pieces, but by continuously being noticed and reflected back by a counsellor, he could observe himself as collected into an image, giving him a sense of wholeness and control over himself (Phillips, 2007).

When Callum gets annoyed, he is frustrated by the fact that he cannot be properly understood. This phenomenon of transference shows what his inner conflict is. “The psychodynamic concept of transference, understood as a semiotic process of enacting early interpersonal patterns in the subject’s present relations, provides a link between the unfolding of subjectivity in the present and its historical continuity” (Georgaca, 2001, p. 223). The transference happened here concerns language. Because Callum’s parents do not speak English and even rely on him to be a translator, mediating between them and the outside world, I believe he faces a lot of difficulties in learning English, which in turn causes a huge lack of holding space in the language. The frustration he experiences when I fail to understand him is perhaps not only about the miscommunication between us, but is also concerned with the frustration he experiences with his parents, his peers and other people around him, and maybe even his own struggle to make himself understood in the language. These feelings may be transferred towards me through the relationship. Though we face obstacles in our communication because we are both using a second language and that causes

frustration and anger, it does not mean that we cannot work in a therapeutic way. On the contrary, it actually creates a unique power dynamic in the relationship because we both feel a sense of loss and longing for connection in the language when others can't always get it right. The connection we have made is even closer to our usual experience. Very little research has shown in detail what it is like for counsellor and client to speak a shared second language by the client and counsellor and whether this enhances or diminishes the strength a counselling relationship.

Furthermore, the frustration one experiences can be traced to the experience of infantile powerlessness, and as long as a benign counselling relationship is established, these frustrations can be worked through in different circumstances. The process requires the counsellor to be active, engaging, congruent and at the same time respectful and empathic in order to help the client develop insights into the core of his self (van Kalmthout, 2007). If I were a native counsellor, I might miss the frustration Callum was experiencing in regard to language. Another frustration of the same quality might possibly take another route to present itself and would need to be worked through in a different way.

I am particularly touched by that moment when neither of us knew an English word, but could still understand each other through our mother tongue(s). I believe that it is our attempt to understand and communicate that really matters in this case. The psychological contact we have achieved so far has helped us to become more tolerant of the language gap. It is mutually understood that a counsellor gives clients full attention in the room. To develop "a third position" as a practitioner means to

survive the relationship and it indicates a live contact with the client through the awareness of the counsellor (Ogden, 1994; Rizq, 2006). As experience grows, it gets easier and more manageable for a trainee counsellor to bracket his/her anxiety as a counsellor, enabling him/her to develop more freedom to voice, to challenge, and to reflect for therapeutic purposes, rather than to aim at self-achievement. Likewise, clients also become freer and more comfortable about trusting, communicating and making use of the counselling relationship for a therapeutic objective. This project has provided a lot of inspiration for my work and as I think through it I start to see how a second language can be an enriching experience for the dyad (Georgiadou, 2014). Research has put a lot of emphasis on the drawbacks of speaking a second language, but it has not touched on the connection that a foreign language can create in clinical work.

4.3.2 Example: Daniel - a bossy doctor

Daniel was a 7-year-old boy. At the 9th session, Daniel asked me to do role play again with him. It was a game he was very fond of and played every time we met. He played the doctor and I was the patient. This doctor he played was sleeping in the office, and was woken up by my phone call to make an appointment. He was grumpy and said I should come as soon as possible. Then he gave me the instruction that I should be late for the appointment. He coldly said "You are late, you need to wait outside the office because I'm already with another patient." It was horrible that I didn't get the chance to see a doctor and I was surprised that his attitude was distant and cold. Instantly I had a defensive thought of retaliation and told him not to be so

mean, but I was aware that this was his game and his internal world playing out, so I acknowledged to him my feelings of being rejected and hurt, as in the role of a punished patient. He shrugged and said “Well, that’s not my business.” I felt the irritation in me and nearly forgot his real character. Inside this demeanour of an adult, he was a soft-hearted kid, sensitive, and didn’t know how to deal with his upset apart from showing it through anger. He sometimes could speak like an “intimidating” adult, which made me wonder what it means for him to be a boy, to be a man, to be important, powerful and in control. He gave me a hard time in the room that day; it felt as if I was being bullied by this boy. It felt as if I’d never known him before and he acted in such a real way to show me he didn’t care about me or my hurtful feelings at all. He pretended to fall asleep at work and left me wondering what I should be doing while he did that. I felt the tension between the two roles, but in my mind I couldn’t verbalise that feeling and maybe somehow being “bullied” by an 8-year-old boy was just unthinkable. He was clearly very anxious about time and had a very fast rate of changing games. He led the role play, then changed to doll house, then to football. He was busy in his own head thinking about what to play and how to play all the games in one hour, and my role was only to assist him to play rather than being involved in the game. I found it hard to keep up with him, and a lot of the time I was thinking maybe I shouldn’t allow him to have so much power over me. I knew if I said no, he would come back from that powerful role to that boy who was caring, helpful and anxious. But I chose to hold that feeling in me. When that session came to an end, I felt bottled up with rejection and abandonment. He walked out of the room; I was even thinking maybe he would not wait to leave together. But

he returned with the “Room in use” banner in his hand, telling me that he had helped me to take this off and we could leave now.

After I walked him to the exit, I went to the staff room feeling overwhelmed by the sense of being dumped and ignored. I told my colleague and shouted “I think I was bullied by this boy!” This spontaneous reaction shocked me. I felt bad when I perceived him as abusing his power in the room, though consciously I knew that it was me actually allowing him to do that, and that I chose to give him that space, with the awareness that this was probably the only place he could initiate an adult into the things he wanted to happen, have the power he wanted to possess, the freedom he wanted to experience.

This is a special session I had with this particular boy, of a kind that never occurred again to such an extent. The feeling I experience is so strong that the thought of retaliation even arises, mixed with confusion and hurt. These feelings complicate my mind and in the session I cannot put my finger on the exact reason, the exact feeling I was experiencing, the exact word I should use to reflect back to him. The whole session is very emotionally charged. My mind is busy both with catching up with his high speed and with sorting out the emotional message he is trying to communicate. But I do not have the words; I find it extremely hard to feel relaxed enough to consider how to articulate it to him, because he has not allowed enough space for me to interpret or reflect, if I am not to interrupt his fast-paced effort to play all the games he knows in that one hour. After the session, I initially felt very relieved, then confused, then critical of my capacity to manipulate the language. It seems that I am

always taking a short cut to explain my predicament by attributing it to my unskillfulness with language. However, as I think about the therapeutic process, if I dare to be confident enough to acknowledge that my English is at working proficiency level, if I dare to leave it out of the picture for a moment, I will recognise that the session contains work so much richer than that concerning mere deficiency of language. It is an illustration of how non-verbal attunement works in relationship without verbal intervention. In this example, Daniel makes use of the space and the object to finish a significant process of projection and reparation through our relationship. Meanwhile, what I do is to let him lead the session in a safe setting, play alongside him, sustain the hard feeling that he and I experience, take it in, digest it outside the session in supervision, then ponder on it and gently reflect it back to him. The whole process is finished with no direct verbal articulation; but from the following sessions, I learn that these elements of confusion, hurt, and anger can be sublimated to a solid relationship that he dares to make use of freely. I include the 10th session we had in the following week.

The 10th session:

“This has been somehow a turning point in our relationship that leads both of us to see the hope of a benign way of using one’s power,” I wrote on my process note.

While I am considering how to appropriately let him understand how suffocating the last session was, our work takes an entirely different route in the following session.

The change I notice in him is evident. He starts to slow down in the session and takes his time to focus on one particular game. We do the doctor and patient role-play again, but a good relationship begins to emerge. He gives me a very bad diagnosis of

cancer but to my surprise he starts to show empathy towards me. He finally cures me with his new “blood experiments”. We are both very grateful to each other because I’m getting well and he has become such a capable and trustworthy doctor. Because of him being able to focus on things, I feel that I can finally hold back and not be so up-front reactive; I can have the space to think, observe and reflect. There is breathing space for me in the sessions and we can be quietly and peacefully together. It is a new quality of the relationship that we are emotionally separate in a peaceful rather than painful way. It is as if he eventually develops the capacity to play on his own without needing me to get heavily involved in the game. He can be alone and contain himself in a secure way.

I couldn’t help wondering what changed the whole dynamic entirely. Speculating on the therapeutic process based on my experience of the relationship between us, I think that the change from feeling suffocated to being able to breathe again gives me a possible entry to his internal world. In a modern view of psychoanalytic therapy, the counsellor’s unconscious understands that of his clients (Cartwright, 2010; Bion, 1959). Heimann (1958, p. 10) suggests that “the emotions roused in the counsellor are much nearer to the heart of the matter than his reasoning”, which means that the unconscious connection between the dyad reveals earlier and more acutely the client’s true inner conflicts than the conscious conception of the situation (Heimann, 1960). Therefore, the awareness of the feelings stirred in the counsellor provides significant material for disclosing what is going on in the client. The emotional sensibility of the counsellor towards transference and countertransference – that is, the external demonstration of the client’s internal way of relating in the relationship

– thus gives important indicators and clues that help to unfold the client’s inner conflicts.

In the 9th session, he launches his attack on me; his responses tell me that he does not care about me at all. In the role play, he gives me orders to fail the appointment, then rejects me coldly and distantly, leaving me waiting in despair, fear and disappointment that I would not be able to be seen or get healed. He puts on the persona of an adult man to manipulate his power over me. He shuts himself off from me, sleeps at his job regardless of the fact that I am waiting outside, shows no empathy or mercy towards my illness but only cares about his own need. He announces that I have incurable cancer and then suggests cutting my legs off. Then he stops the game, giving me no chance to argue or reflect. Then he hurries me up to begin another new game that he wants to play. These moments leave me with a sense of being swayed by a stormy sea, about to be slapped down by a strong wave if I’m not careful. By changing games non-stop and leaving no space for me to respond or reflect, Daniel is perhaps holding on to himself, “avoiding even momentary pauses that carried the risk that I would fail to be there, thus leaving him to fall into an abyss of fear and vulnerability” (Carroll, 2005, p. 91). The feelings triggered by his behaviour unsettle me. I do not know what “attack” will be coming next. Being rejected elicits natural confusion, fear and discomfort too. This mixture of feelings, muddled up with the self-conscious second language doubt, make my mind rather full as we near the end of that session. To be fairly honest, the one thought I hold on to at that point is to believe that he acts this way in counselling for the purpose of communication; it is maybe the best way or even the only way that he knows to show

me what it is like for him internally. The only approach I can think of as therapeutic at this moment is to empathise with that part of him that needs to feel powerful and lets it out in this way, rather than to retaliate as adults usually do in his life. To stay with the suffocating feeling is not pleasant at all. During the session, I think to myself that I need to take this to supervision.

I speculate that in this same session, he projects his internal conflict and “badness” onto me; he wants me to experience for him the feelings of being bullied and bruised by “powerful” adults. I think Klein’s theory of transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position sheds light on my understanding of the change. Perhaps Daniel projects his bad objects into me, treating me as if I am a bad patient who is late for an appointment, a weak, unimportant and powerless object. But it is actually the badness and destructive thoughts inside that scare him, and he wants to get them out so that I can look after them. My feelings of suffocation to some degree resemble his internal strain that he tries to shut off and his lack of self-acceptance. He needs to project onto me these scary bits – bad objects – that he cannot live at peace with. Unconsciously he communicates that experience to me through role play, assuming the demeanour of the powerful aggressor and healer and letting me be controlled by him through oppressing and bruising me in play. I feel deep empathy for him after gaining this relational realisation. He is a soft-hearted boy but he doesn’t want to show his gentleness and empathy to people because to him that would mean weakness, powerlessness, and a lack of manliness. I understand his dilemma as he faces the conflict involved in integrating the two aspects – being strong as well as being kind – so that they co-exist in peace.

Furthermore, in the 10th session, after I have “survived” this “suffocation”, Daniel unconsciously experiences the possibility of making a success of the integration (Winnicott, 1969). He sees that I can handle his internal conflict and that I am still safe after his full-blown manipulation of power over me. He comes to recognise that it is me, the same person, who gets all the “bad” bits that scare him and the “good” bits that he desires. Therefore he can bridge the two and hold them together. In Klein’s (1947) terms, he goes from the paranoid-schizoid position where the split between bad and good is absolute, to the depressive position where bad and good can integrate and co-exist in one person. My survival may help to clear his fear of the feelings of suffocation and despair and, more importantly, the fear that I will retaliate. After seeing what I give back to him once I have digested the conflict and fear in this session, he can manage to take back his projection and reach the place of repair. Because I experience his destructiveness and badness and take them in, he can see that he is being taken seriously and is having an impact on me (Cartwright, 2010; Carpy, 1989). Therefore it’s important for him to see that I have survived his attempt to desert me or destroy me. This experience of being received, accepted and responded to with gentleness and care, I believe, is the very source of his ability to experience change. “It creates small moments of emotional settling or unsettling for a new experience to be incorporated into the child’s psyche, which jolts the patient out of their habitual responses to enable an opportunity for different experience” (Orbach, 2005, p. 4). Daniel could then say sorry, show empathy and behave accordingly to repair the relationship, having absorbed the fact that “showing weakness and powerlessness” and being vulnerable is not an absolutely detrimental

and hopeless state of affairs. If I could survive the “badness”, he can survive it too. Then he might develop the ability to own this “badness”. And when that happens I get the feeling that I can now back off from our conflict in myself and let him be alone in my presence. To my surprise, this process of sustaining feelings uses hardly any verbalised language, but it profoundly affects the therapeutic relationship. At such a time, the counsellor can afford to not know, without being shaken or unbalanced by the threat of the unknown. Even if the counsellor’s mind is full and emotionally charged, there is still some internal space for reworking the not-knowing. Even though there is no precise descriptive articulation, the non-verbal attunement and faith in the counselling process often sustain a counsellor in working through the complexities of a session.

When I look back on the two sessions, I realise that all the work with Daniel is mainly conducted through a non-verbal connection between us that leads me to behave in a certain way in order to be therapeutic. I remember that after the 9th session I thought to myself: it’s a shame that I could not respond with a reflection and description of how he possibly feels. But now I consider that it is not really a linguistic process and verbal interpretation about the ‘attack’ and ‘survival’ at this point may not be essential and may bring its own danger (Winnicott, 1969). Even if I were a native counsellor, the words I could say might not be quite relevant. It is the counsellor’s capacity to take the client in, sustain the feelings, and survive the attack, that truly matters more than the capacity to give back to them the right words for describing their feelings. Counselling is “a consistent, predictable and secure setting where clients’ frightening and intolerable feelings or thoughts could be held and

transformed by the counsellor and then returned in a digestible form” (Hopper, 2007, p. 44). To hold on to the ethical principles and the awareness of the therapeutic process, to be attentive and not retaliate when pain and complications arise, to digest the threatening bits clients bring and give them back in a less scary way, actually carry more weight in counselling. To learn how to take risks and bear with the unknown – to allow the “bullying” – shows the collaborative nature of counselling. The counsellor’s knowledge and judgement are derived from an understanding of psychological processes as well as an acute clinical sensitivity that facilitates knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say nothing at all (Orbach, 2005, p. 5). It is this acute capacity to attune to the internal conflicts that the clients struggle with, to attune to the secure/insecure quality of the relationship, that truly counts. That does not need a native language so much as an open mind, genuine interest, confidence and responsiveness in risk-taking.

4.3.3 Discussion

As counsellors grow in language proficiency, clinical confidence and relational insight, second language use can become a more accessible part of the counsellor’s self, which is no longer fearful, over-anxious or over-worried, but has arrived at a contained and congruent state. In my understanding, this development corresponds with the learning curve of a trainee from operating skills to developing a way of being interpersonally (Clarkson, 2003; Kivlighan, 2008; Cutts, 2012). A limited amount of research touches on the overlapping area of trainees’ development and second language use and even less on how they affect each other in practice

(Georgiadou, 2015). This section offer case examples that present two occasions when the quality of the counselling relationship changed without a major change of language to give the reader a picture of what it is like to develop from the ‘worrying and stumbling’ position I mentioned in section 4.2 to a relational understanding of second language use in counselling. I include more work with children in this section because children are more straightforward with their opinions of the language issue, whereas adult clients tend to be more reserved with negative feedback which includes pointing out the mistakes a counsellor makes. Also, since children usually do not have an extensive vocabulary with which to express themselves, a counsellor needs to use sufficiently easy words when reflecting, and to practise presence with them through all sorts of material. It then presents challenges and also opportunities for a second language speaking counsellor, to not only think about appropriate articulation but also discover alternative resources.

As confidence increases, the relationship between the practitioner and the second language develops too. Though anxiety is still present, tolerance towards it grows. As a result, it gets more tolerable and less threatening to experience doubt and not-knowing what clients mean or not-understanding what is happening in session, because of the confidence in what the counsellor does know (Orbach, 2005). The counsellor develops to the point where he/she not only relies on linguistic skills such as reflection, paraphrasing, checking in and out with clients’ feelings etc., but also develops a pattern for an all-round working style: considering different levels of communication – including transference interpretation, challenging clients’ perception, observing the implicit exchange and shifts in rhythm, perspectives and

clients' orientation, and also developing trust and making use of the counsellor's spontaneous reactions and countertransference etc. (Carroll, 2005). When the counsellor grows more present, the session becomes fuller and richer, so that the relationship allows clients a space for change and counsellors to stumble. Counselling then goes beyond verbal communication to become a simultaneously relational, open and reflective space.

From my experience as a practitioner, through endless self-doubt I have gained something from my "foreignness" – skills, confidence, experiences, and assertiveness in my second language. To my surprise, the steadiness of client attendance has also increased as I become more grounded in my capacity, approach and workplace. As I become more familiar with counselling skills and feel at ease, I start to notice that the language I use no longer inhibits me to the point of restraint and I no longer believe that every problem is to do with language. By being able to address the issue in a genuine and containing way, I can offer my clients the example of practising congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard towards one's inner self. This change has occurred along with my improvement in listening and increased verbal fluency in English. I have become aware that my relationship with the profession has also changed as a result. I have gradually come to feel more like an insider in the counselling profession, and that sense of professional belonging has helped in turn to improve the quality of my practice. I then develop this inner space to dare to look at the issue of being a foreigner, which was an impossible task when I was a very new trainee.

When I start to examine the issue of the second language barrier, I think that a foreign language to some degree becomes an easy target onto which to project all my fears and worries, through the thought: “I don’t do counselling well because I speak English as a second language”. It becomes a ready excuse which explains every difficulty I meet, and which I consider careless and too easy. The actual fear of feeling powerless or helpless goes deeper into the psyche than mere difficulty with verbal skills. The mutual interpretation and relationship between a counsellor and a client is much more profound than linguistic communication. The sense of breathing, of a rapid or slow heart-beat, of the pace of speech, of turn-taking or even of silence contains a lot of information, messages and dynamics. I certainly do not intend to say that language use is insignificant, because it is essential, but there is more to the counselling relationship than that. From the two examples I see that counselling relationships can be established and ruptures can be bridged regardless of imperfect use of language.

The concept of attunement gives a good explanation of what can be achieved non-verbally between two persons. It means to bring into accord, to cause a person to have a better understanding of what is needed or wanted by a particular person (Stern, 1985). Its quality approximates Winnicott’s idea of being good enough parents by connecting with the infants’ experiences through non-verbal play and helping them avoid extreme intense experiences (Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1964). Through being held and supported by empathic parents, the infants start to internalise this sense of holding, then learn to attend to their own experience in an accepting way; and so their ability to hold their experience develops. To grow attunement in

relationship, the counsellor needs to use her listening skills, and also to learn about and make use of her embodied experiences, her self, and thus to develop insights into the resonance of the dyad (Stern, 1985). The desire to be noticed, seen, and acknowledged sometimes communicates itself through the clients' unconscious. It is up to the counsellor to pick that up and mirror it to the clients so that they come to recognise their internal feeling states (Stern, 1985). How one's unconscious act out through transference and countertransference can often offer opportunities to discover and give voice to a client's intangible relating style and help the client to make sense of it.

The process of attunement is not always restricted by the language a counsellor uses; rather it is more to do with an unconscious communication through feelings, sensations, associations and even distractions in the counsellor. Lomas (1981, p. 26) has summed up the quality of this kind of attentive listening. "It is not the concentration of conscious effort to perfect a technique or adhere to a theory, but the concentration that appears naturally when one person is interested in another's being". Clients for the first time become aware of their inner world and come into real contact with their feelings through the therapeutic relationship by expressing and externalising them (van Kalmthout, 2007). Active listening is more than a set of micro skills such as using minimal prompts, adopting open postures, reflecting, paraphrasing and summarising.

Trainees develop their presence in practice by going beyond the mere imitation of body posture and verbal acknowledgement to the experience of engaging with their

whole being (Wosket, 1999). It is an integration of thinking along with feeling, reflecting and being present. It implies “a letting go of skills, of knowledge, of experience, of preconceptions, even of the desire to heal, to be present” (Clarkson, 1990, p. 159). The trust counsellors have in their own minds, their associations, their boredom or distraction, could tell us something about the counselling relationship. In my example, after all, I can never be a native. When I accept the fact that I will always be a foreign counsellor, I feel adequate and responsible enough to train myself by experimenting with my own phrases for asking challenging questions, paraphrasing clients’ conflicts, or empathising with them in my own style, rather than speaking abruptly, harshly or timidly, or in someone else’s persona.

Here I would like to refer to this position as “attuning and connecting” that a counsellor experiences when the non-linguistic relationship can complement the verbal language he/she uses. The example of Callum shows that the connection between the dyad can be established despite mistakes and the lack of words; it is the counsellor’s capacity to contain the clients emotionally and empathetically that really helps to build the relationship. Daniel’s example shows that many of a client’s internal conflicts are not relevant to language use; unconscious communication can be achieved even in silence through non-verbal attunement. Often the counsellor’s unconscious understands the client better and more acutely than his/her rational perception.

4.4 Relaxing and playing position

4.4.1 Example: Adam - a 6-year-old English teacher

Part A

When Adam, a 6-year-old-boy, was referred to counselling, his mum had been recently diagnosed with severe mental illness and hospitalised. Adam got to see her weekly but he was very scared to be with her alone. He had recently moved to live with Dad who he used to see only weekly. Adam appeared very anxious, and sometimes would tend to daydream a lot. When he first came, he would run around the table, in something like a self-soothing gesture, repeating the same pattern of movement. He seemed a bit withdrawn, a bit unsure of what he was involved in at the moment. He liked to have his quiet time, couldn't bear noises or loudness. The first time I saw him, I knew he liked animals very much because he was originally from Africa. I told him I was from China. He liked drawing. He said he was going to draw a cheetah. "What is a cheetah?" I asked him and explained that I was not a native speaker and would sometimes check with him what the word means. In the third year of my practice, I was already used to explaining the second language issue with clients whenever I felt it was appropriate. "A cheetah is the fastest animal in the world. It's like a cat." He appeared very curious about my coming from another country. He was curious about the fact that I didn't know the word "cheetah", and said "I have a lot of knowledge about the world". "Have you seen a ninja in China?" He began to ask more questions about Asia. I told him that I have never seen any nijia and he was not very surprised because he knew ninja moved so fast

that people couldn't really see them. Then he started to check more words in every session to see if I knew what he meant. It was odd to him that some of the words I knew, and some of the words I didn't. He was very proud that he knew a lot. "Do you know what 'structure' is?" he asked me when he was building a sand castle. "Yes, I do know the word structure." I wondered what this pattern of word checking was about when he knew that I spoke a different native language. Whether he felt uncertain, or confused, or worried, or distrustful, I thought it was important to know which feeling suited his situation.

Part B

In one of the sessions, Adam circled the wrong number on our contracted calendar, then he suddenly realised it and started to panic. He lay face down on the floor and buried his head in his hands and looked very disturbed. I was very surprised to see that side of him. Unlike his usual rational aspect in the room, he behaved like a boy who had nearly fainted and couldn't handle the mistake in front of us. I talked with him gently and wondered about what was happening to him. He said "It's mad. I'm mad to make that mistake". I looked at him and let him take his time. He stood up and sat on the chair facing me. His head was still in his hands. I said "It's not a big mistake, it's OK, but from the way you react, it seems very important to you." He calmed down a bit and said, "'It's not 'react', you should use 'act' in this sentence. Do you know what 'react' means?" I nodded, corrected my sentence and repeated my reflection again. He said "I thought I was going to faint" and blushed. He looked OK. We continued our session and played with the idea of fainting.

With Adam, there is an interesting dynamic in the room particularly around language, in the way that the precision of using language denotes power. Excerpts from my process note include “head in his hands” and “looked very disturbed”. I was very surprised by his English words. He is very good at spelling as well, whereas many young children cannot achieve this level. He is very intelligent. He will comment on my use of English words as well: “You just said a very good word ‘transform’”, when I describe how a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. He will recognise my choice of words when I do well and give me a lesson when I get it wrong. “It’s not ‘react’, it should be ‘act’”. He always seeks some opportunity to teach me. He is very precise with the words that he uses. I don’t know if he only does it with me, or if he also does it with others in school or even his family as well. He is like an English teacher with me rather than a 6-year-old boy. I reflected to myself that I’m not sure how this unique dynamic impacts our therapeutic alliance – either this would cause him to worry about me not getting what he means, or he could make use of this experience to obtain internal power. Furthermore, how does it operate to achieve a therapeutic outcome?

In this case example, I would like to explore the power of language in relationship. The sophistication of language can create a situation of power in which the non-native is less powerful (Corson, 1993). With other clients, I do not experience the same competitive power dynamic in the room as I do when Adam is with me, although I speak English at the same level of proficiency with the other clients. I have worked with other children who never pay much attention to the fact that I

cannot name all the toy animals in the room, and who never comment on my capacity for speaking English. In this sense, I believe that what is unique is Adam's relationship with language, and that the way he makes use of this capacity in relationship shows something about him. The way he holds on to the powerful position shows determination and even enjoyment. In the meantime, I believe that language is just an available medium for presenting this desire in a surprisingly obvious way. It's not that he wants me to admire him; it's more about making sure that he has the more powerful position. It is curious that I experience him not as a six-year-old but as an equal. I get the sense that sometimes he is almost showing off how much he knows about the world; sometimes he makes things up to impress me with how marvellous he is. It seems that he wants to be seen as good and competent, he strives for acknowledgement and recognition, and he wants to be seen as bigger and stronger than he actually is. Perhaps he wants to display that pride to me.

In the earliest stage of our work, the feeling his behaviour stirred up in me was a wish to defend myself and not to make mistakes in order to avoid criticism and rejection, and to meet his needs by giving him recognition and compliments. I reflect on this feeling that I'm not good enough in the relationship, and meanwhile try to make him feel even better by fuelling his self-esteem with praise. It is almost a power-over position. "Power over" by its very nature dictates the form of a relationship: one person has the ability to decide the rules of discourse and the direction that the relationship will take. The more powerful person also has assumed the right to receive support from the less powerful, whenever needed, and on the

former's terms. This system then is by definition "rigid, not flexible, and decidedly not mutual" (Jordan, 2004, p. 35-36).

Firstly, this power dynamic created specifically around language precision fascinates me. From a psychodynamic perspective, I understand this as countertransference, whereby my feeling of inferiority due to speaking inadequate English suggests that my experience is something like Adam's: it contains a craving for power and pride, seen as a desire to retrieve infantile omnipotence, the reluctance to separate "my" world from "yours" (Winnicott, 1960). The fantasy of omnipotence comes from the total adaptation of the mother to the baby's needs and the baby's absolute dependence on the mother. From the view of the baby, the existence of the world is created by the baby: what's felt to be good is preserved in the ego and what's felt to be bad is eliminated. As the baby grows, he/she must experience disillusionment about his omnipotence and start to accept the separation of a "felt" world in order to develop a social sense and a relationship to the "outer" world, thus furthering a sense of responsibility (Winnicott, 1964). This transitional process is inevitably painful for the baby, but it is essential. Thereafter, the gap between fantasy and reality can be perceived, and objectivity and maturity can be achieved (Davis & Wallbridge, 1981). This understanding inspires me to explore how to help clients achieve maturity where it's no longer approached from a competitive and oppositional "you lose, I gain" position, but from a mutually empowering position in which we both gain understanding and are not opponents. In my understanding, the way Adam behaves shows that he is experiencing disillusionment with his omnipotence, and this can only be achieved through a modicum of omnipotent experience, according to

Winnicott (1964). I think that he spent so much time in the room checking words with me, teaching me, praising and criticising me in order to obtain a sense of power and control: a sense of safe communication. He cannot be reached or pushed to build a relationship until he achieves a certain level of maturity at which the social relationship, the “From me” world, is accepted without too much threat, so that reality becomes available to his inner psyche. That also explains my sense of being excluded from his world, my sense of insecurity in relation to the setting. His unconscious distrust of the room, the setting that includes me, is like a shield that he builds around him so that no one can have access to him and really relate to him. With me, a person who speaks English as a second language, the tendency is particularly in evidence because he can actually use language as a defence and do all these things through language. Checking words becomes a convenient way to express, obtain, and exchange power with the outer world – but from a relatively secure setting. As a result, Adam can use me therapeutically to develop autonomy and connectedness.

Secondly, I would like to discuss in interpersonal terms how to understand and make use of the countertransference I experience due to the unique dynamic generated through speaking a second language in the room. In Adam’s case, I sometimes feel strongly pressured to ask him about the word I hear, since I am unsure how he perceives it. Asking too often will be a bit annoying. Sometimes I can guess the meaning of words from the context but it might be a slow process. I also sometimes feel embarrassed about being educated. It then depends on how I understand the origin of the countertransference: whether I see it as a personal challenge, or see it

from a relational angle as his cry for power and understanding. Is it OK for me to be challenged by him, and is it OK to lose my power? It is about self-awareness. I think that to empathise Adam's way of relating I need to consider his circumstances at this stage where there is no stability, no real peace in the family, and most importantly no control over the situation. As we work together over a longer period of time, to create and sustain this holding environment is even more important than to provide a clever interpretation. Children learn to label their own experiences through hearing those experiences contained and named by others over a period of time. Initially, this labelling will be quite primitive and distant, becoming much more subtle and complex later (Winnicott, 1960). As children grow older, they develop a sense of how a particular experience fits with larger personal, family, and cultural identities (Stern, 1985). This empowering process will help children to develop inner self-containment.

In addition, I wonder what it is like for Adam when the counsellor reflects feelings, especially intense feelings, in a sentence containing some error. How does it affect our relationship and the power dynamic? In Part B, this experience is very important to both of us. I perceive him as a very contained boy who never makes a mess; even when using paint, he only touches the material with one finger. I believe different people use the room differently for different reasons. Even if two people are both very tidy and good at cleaning up, they may have different reasons and be acting out very different inner worlds. From Part B I can see his inability to contain his emotions. He instantly becomes fragile and panics at the sight of his error. It seemed huge to him, although it was a trivial mistake in reality and we could actually repair

it. I cannot help wondering about it and drawing a connection with his emotional reaction to his mum's current mental illness. When caregivers are overwhelmed or preoccupied with their own needs, it is often very difficult for them to hold their children's experiences empathically (Warner, 1991). The fragility displayed by Adam is perhaps an indication that he is overwhelmed by his emotions. Though my reflection is not precise in all aspects, the words reach him and soothe him somehow. My way of owning my mistake in language use, accepting it, correcting it and still trying to reflect that back to him in order to repair the relationship, may set an example for him as well. The resilience, willingness and capacity to repair is demonstrated through the use and correction of a second language.

4.4.2 Example: Bob - a gentle and intimidating boss

Bob, a nine-year-old, was a Scottish lad. His demeanour was that of a tough "strong man". He was referred to child counselling with anger issues. Bob was taking part in a strategy course in learning to control his anger with techniques. He was described by his parents as a sensitive boy who reacted very badly when upset – he usually got angry towards his sensitivity. He was probably embarrassed or even ashamed of being sensitive and feeling upset. When Bob first came to the play room, he sat down like a boss with his arms crossed. He was fascinated with playing a busy man who works in a big company, being a very "important" person, picking up phone calls, making appointments every five minutes, having no time for others. Even when he was in an appointment with me, he needed to pick up other phone calls. "It must be

very difficult to be so busy,” I suggested. “Yeah, it’s hard to be me. It’s very busy because this is a big company.” The nonstop pace drew my attention. It stirred up the feeling in me of being ignored, insignificant and being pushed to catch up with him. I felt a bit impatient when he appeared to be “self-centred” and paid no attention to my part in the play. I thought to myself maybe we were not going at the same pace. He was still exploring the setting and how he could make use of my role in the room, but I wanted to address issues too quickly because I felt deskilled when most of the time my reflection did not reach him as I expected. At those times, I was more self-conscious about English becoming a barrier between us. I wanted to be more useful in the room to help him and to facilitate the exploration, and this awareness was sharp and true. I then adjusted myself, slowed down a bit and tried to work at the same pace as him and to observe alongside him.

He was preoccupied with the business, and when I was asked to play a part, usually I became a target on whom he was going to exercise his power. One typical example was that in our second meeting, I was asked to give ideas for game design to be assessed by him as “good”, or as measured by the piano keyboard in the room, on which a high pitch was “very good” and a low pitch was “very bad”. I immediately felt pushed and started to feel the pressure of wanting to be “good” and giving brilliant ideas. Meanwhile I was rationally aware that I didn’t have to be assessed or be good, and that the feeling of being pushed exactly reflected his relating style to others. But as soon as I felt pushed and “intimidated” by this seven-year-old, I was aware of starting to censor what was going on in me, my responses. As a result of this process, it gradually became difficult to progress from a third position – where I

reflected on the psychological process he experienced and the dynamic of what was happening between us, as a reflective counsellor. The fast pace in the room occupied my mind quite a bit and somehow I found my capacity for English was declining. I started to think, "I wish I could be capable enough to follow every word of his. What would a native counsellor do when they faced him?" I felt there was a language barrier in front of me against using words to reflect back. It gets hard to come up with the right words, names, verbs, to describe what he is doing. Though I experienced this moment of feeling slow and incapable, I gained some awareness that this was not just about my proficiency with English; there was also something not-yet-known that accounted for my experience with him. So I decided to let go of the concerns about language, in the knowledge that anxiety would impact on my fluency. I knew from past experience that language was not the main reason why I couldn't catch up with his pace, but the idea of being "not good enough" troubled me. Relationship, as a mutual thing, required both of us to make some effort. Therefore, I bracketed this moment of distraction and turned my attention back to Bob's play.

The work with Bob inspires me to reflect on this sense of feeling inferior, and discover that it seems there is an ideal image of a "native" counsellor who would do better than me, be faster than me and more reactive, and process the meaning more quickly than I do. It is as if there is an ideal figure which always surpasses me in many ways in my mind. I start to question the rationale for this figure and wonder where this thought comes from. It is not exactly rational. As a counsellor, I need to do quite a lot of simultaneous processing – being spontaneous in the game,

responding rather than reacting, and adopting a counsellor's reflective and relational angle and voice in a second language (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). It is a lot of work. It is not uncommon that speaking a second language causes temporary preoccupation with self-expression and a feeling of distraction during counselling (Verdinelli & Biever, 2009). It is a form of wrestling with myself, my vocabulary, and the precision of my language. It goes further than that: I doubt whether I can be accountable in the work as a witness and a helper. Language becomes a convenient reason for self-doubt. I then wonder whether, in Chinese, I would be this ideally immediate and precise counsellor that I imagine I ought to be. "*Is the problem all about language?*" I wonder to myself in my personal journal. As soon as I consider the counselling relationship, the answer is No. English just functions like an object onto which I project my frustration and anger about not being as good as I ought to be, about something that I cannot accept in myself, such as not knowing what to do. During the beginning phase as a trainee, language too often was my main concern. Now it is still one of my anxiety-provoking factors. Fortunately, I think that, through cumulative experience and reflection, it's no longer a huge "black-hole" concern, or an unknown or unacknowledged worry which consumes enormous amounts of energy. It becomes manageable, mentionable and much less threatening through repeated reality-testing with my clients. I get to a relaxed state of mind, with the knowledge that even if I stumble with words it is OK. It is temporary and can be repaired. I can allow myself to be clumsy and distracted without losing sight of the therapeutic purpose.

This characteristic of temporary preoccupation and distraction in trainee development is no longer an entirely detrimental element but becomes a way to experience our clients, to allow our clients to affect us, and to make therapeutic use of ourselves (Ogden, 1992; Wosket, 1999). In this case example, what's unique with Bob— what stands out among all the feelings I experience — is the desire to prove that “I am good enough” in the room. I speculate it is not about me, but also says something about Bob. The way he assesses me, praises me or disapproves of my choice, gives a clue to his internal world. The fear of being rejected, criticized or rebuffed is aroused. Feeling stuck in his self-image is not easy for Bob. It's like the way I feel in the room: wanting to be good, fearing that I might fail his assessment, not daring to say “*I find myself under pressure to think of good ideas and that is not a comfortable feeling*”. It's unpleasant for me to feel clamped, and probably for Bob as well. In addition, the struggle with self-importance is evident: somehow his self-worth becomes a bit distorted, becomes more like a façade rather than self-acceptance. In turn, it leaves him in a lonely and distressed place. “*Does being busy mean you are important?*” I wonder about his version of importance. With attentive listening and observing, the counsellor gives space to allow the child's feelings to appear, to accept that they are what they are, without judgement or denial, and with genuine understanding (Hopper, 2007). It is important to see that it is about the relationship. In Bob's case, if he can't slow down his pace, he has his reasons. The child needs to know that he is listened to and that his needs are validated and cannot be denied. It is my job to help Bob to communicate the unique meaning in his story (Sunderland, 2001). By giving me instructions, teaching me, criticizing me, and taking turns with me, he achieved a sense of gaining and losing power without

worrying about being humiliated or judged as sensitive or weak. The security of the therapeutic relationship offered an opportunity for a different emotional experience. He could learn by experience that it was possible for someone, e.g. the counsellor, “to respect him unconditionally and to be sincerely concerned about him while also confronting him with certain patterns of behaviour and interaction that were tangible in the relationship with the counsellor” (van Kalmthout, 2007, p. 227). By repeating this process, he will perhaps learn to attend to his own experiences in an accepting way. I do not desire to come to conclusions quickly, but instead I would like to hold open the space for both Bob and my own associations with the language barrier, while maintaining awareness of the need to be therapeutic.

As the worry of language articulation recedes quickly, the possibility of attunement increases, and a creative and spontaneous way of being can be accessed. There is no definite conclusion to this state of relaxation, it is more mental and visceral sense of freedom. It is like an enlarged internal space where one can keep in mind the language barrier, but at the same time not dwell on it; one can give maximal attention on the client. This space is as though bigger than the practitioner because it is co-created by the client and the counsellor. In it, both parties of the dyad can be allowed to stumble but still engage in and trust the therapeutic process.

4.4.3 Discussion

Listening in counselling is not just about hearing the words; it is a demanding and complicated skill that aims to help two people establish a relationship (Feltham,

2000). After discussing the limitations of using a second language, and the good attunement through non-verbal communication that a second language-speaking counsellor can possibly achieve, I use the two examples above to explore the creative use of the dynamic as second language use affects the relationship. Counsellors today make increased use of awareness of their own spontaneous feelings, sensations and impulses towards clients – in other words, countertransference – to engage in the relational dynamic (Carroll, 2005). These feelings, being subjective, can act as acute indicators of unconscious ways of relating to the clients in counselling, thus helping to achieve deeper and more accurate intervention (Orbach, 1999). As the issue of second language taps in, from my experiences, these feelings sometimes can be considered personal issues for a trainee rather than be seen as relational and interpersonal indicators. To examine the exact reaction of practitioners, it helps to give shape to the counsellor's conflicted and complex response to the client. Through insights into countertransference, the counsellor can achieve a more embodied understanding of a client's internal world. Language, as a communication medium and a container of feelings (Freeman, 2017), can become a medium of empowerment and resource for a second language-speaking counsellor. To consider a second language from a relational perspective is quite a new concept in this field. Since the counselling relationship has been regarded as the crucial element that renders changes in clients, the ways of gaining insights with the use of a foreign language opens up a new perspective from which to view the relationship in counselling.

The relationship between the counsellor and the language signifies a significant object relationship from my understanding. If it is manageable and accommodated,

one can feel at ease and relax even when making mistakes. If it is a tense and anxious relationship, the practitioner will be preoccupied with avoiding mistakes, leaving him/her with less internal space. The internal world of a second language-speaking counsellor is played out externally and intertwines with the clients' internal world in practice. They either clash or collaborate with the process of counselling. So here I present my experiences to show that once the counsellor is able to stop seeing the inhibiting effect of the language barrier as an individual deficiency and start to view it as a difference and opportunity in the counselling process, the second language-speaking counsellor will begin to uncover a richer picture of how second language use might possibly be impacting on the dyad relationally, and will be able to use it creatively and sometimes allow "relaxed clumsiness". That means that when language inhibits our capacity as counsellors, we should neither underestimate nor overestimate it, but be ready to address it appropriately. When language is a manageable medium, a sense of stability can be shaped upon it. It is no longer fuelled with anxieties or uncertainties. From my experience, usually the object relationship between the counsellor and the language will become woven together with the countertransference that takes place in the room. The relationship the second language-speaking counsellor has with the language creates a potential base; it becomes part of who the counsellor is, so that clients will be able to use it, consciously or unconsciously. For part of the counsellor's role is to stand for different objects who are significant in a client's life, to help clients identify, negotiate and shift between different positions in relationships such as early infant states, gendered positions, and adult positions (Carroll, 2005, p. 97). Therefore, when becoming an object who possesses the feature of speaking a second language, and is

ready to be made use of by clients, the counsellor treats carefully stray thoughts, associations, hunches, words, and images as well as bodily sensations around language use (Cartwright, 2010). It is possible to make use of the “weakness” and “inferiority” to develop something deeper in the relationship.

Here I name this position as “Relaxing and playing”. According to the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition from novice to expert, a practitioner develops to trust one’s intuitive and analytical approach, to see the overall picture and alternative approaches (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). When I reflect on my work, I find that, as experience grows, the preoccupation with language as a barrier decreases and I begin to trust and make use of my embodied and associative sense in counselling. The more accepting I have become to the distracting or anxious thoughts, the more quickly I recover and concentrate on my client, the more available I become for them. As I develop to feel at ease with the language and sit with it comfortably even though I may make mistakes, I feel freer and more spontaneous to be therapeutic, to allow playfulness with clients.

4.5 Findings of the analysis

Here in this chapter the findings of the data analysis are categorized into three possible positions in my transition as a counsellor who speaks a second language.

- Worrying and stumbling
- Connecting and attuning
- Relaxing and playing.

They are not strictly chronological; instead, at different stages of professional development, I find myself move to and from each position moment by moment.

To conclude the finding, firstly, using a second language can limit and restrict a counsellor's use of self in practice, especially at the beginning of training. I use the examples of Alisa and Becky to illustrate the potential failure one may face when working in a different culture and speaking a different language. Bridging that unfamiliarity and helping clients to "develop an attachment to the counsellor" (Freedman, 2017, p. 80) requires the counsellor to take into consideration what happens in the encounter. With the example of Alisa, I aim to unfold the negative impact a foreign language may have on the counsellor's internal world: it provokes a defence mechanism and paralyses the counsellor, which leads to negative transference and premature ending. Moreover, as language is such a fundamental part of the self, with Becky's example, I speculate that the anxiety around speaking a second language does not entirely leave the practitioner despite the growth of experience. The difference in race, appearance, accent, culture etc. will still trigger anxiety at times, but the time and energy needed to adjust and maintain one's attention and make ethical decisions will be considerably shorter.

Secondly, the second language barrier does not determine an unsuccessful result in counselling work, as most of a counsellor's work is done through non-verbal attunement to the client's internal world. Therapeutic elements such as "containment" and "being with" can be achieved without verbal communication through a counsellor's presence with clients. I conclude from the examples of

Callum and Daniel that, even though the use of a second language is sometimes frustrating for both client and counsellor, a non-verbal connection that is genuine, intimate and trustworthy can be established after all. The issue of language can be therapeutically addressed, explained and discussed, with the result that the second language-speaking counsellor actually sets an example for the client of how to remain steady and secure in oneself while engaging genuinely in relationship.

Thirdly, as I develop a relaxed way of being and allow playfulness in the process, I begin to make use of a second language relationally as an asset. As language constructs one's self so fundamentally, it is bound to create a very unique dynamic in the counselling relationship. Speaking a second language creates a great base for transference – an object for clients to make use of. I use the examples of Adam and Bob to illustrate the relational understanding and creative use of the language barrier to address power issues and empower others.

Through examining the case examples, I find that the overwhelming fear and wariness that a trainee counsellor experiences is temporary, a transitional process undergone as I develop a greater sense of competence in my work. In parallel with the transition from novice to experienced practitioner (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Bischoff et al., 2002; Howard et al., 2006), a second language-speaking trainee counsellor also goes through a similar curve from rigidity to creativity, and from nervous clumsiness to relaxed fluency; then to a place where relational understanding and therapeutic interpretation of a second language become available and can be used creatively. He/she develops integration of knowledge, practical

judgement and self-development through second language use (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). A trainee counsellor often starts in the position of “worrying and stumbling” but I suggest that, as experience grows, he/she does not stay in this anxious position for too long; rather, he/she develops skills and understanding of therapeutic work and learns to integrate all kinds of resources in order to become a more relaxed practitioner. The issue of speaking a second language is still present, but a lucid and coherent connection between feeling and reasoning can be made. Thereafter, the issue of language is no longer a separate element, but is integrated into the whole being of the practitioner and becomes an available resource to be used.

5. Conclusion

In this piece of research, I identified the research question: “What is it like for a trainee who speaks a second language to develop a sense of competence in that language?”, and I explored this evocatively and in-depth using examples from my placement as well as from post-qualification practice as a non-native counsellor. Through the process of reflection and reflexivity, I concluded that my experience of working in a second language is not separable from the counselling relationship, and in fact, much of what I find concerns the impact of speaking a non-native language on my therapeutic relationships, rather than just my transition from novice to professional. Grounded in the person-centred and psychodynamic frameworks, I discussed explicitly and in detail changes in my sense of competence from discussion of six examples, from being an anxious beginner to becoming a confident practitioner to demonstrate the three positions I have identified in practicing in a second language: Worrying and stumbling, Connecting and attuning, Relaxing and playing. I have put these forward in the hope that other non-native practitioners will find that they resonate with their own experiences. Indeed, by presenting an account of my development from beginning trainee to becoming a more confident practitioner, I have shed light on a process that all trainees go through. As well as benefitting other trainees, my intention is that this project will also be informative to practitioners and tutors who are involved in training counsellors and other professionals practicing in a second language. Language is more than words; it helps to construct the self, and this piece of research seeks to encourage people to be

curious and open about the experiences of practitioners working in a foreign language.

Throughout this thesis, as a researcher I have made use of reflexivity to look at the trajectory of my development as a practitioner who speaks a second language in counselling. The reflexive research serves to be inspiring and enriching when examining in detail the things I easily take for granted such as the prevalent anxiety around second language usage. The account contributes to knowledge that anxiety, fear, frustration and other feelings that surround the situation of speaking a second language are often multi-layered; the non-native issue often becomes an easy object upon which to project all my worries about being a trainee. It is not only about actual proficiency in using a non-native language at work, but more about bridging the gap between the language and self, to develop a way of being therapeutic as well as balancing different “voices” in practice, working through the “preoccupation”, and developing a way of being in counselling (Vanneste, Chiu, Russell, & Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 64). This personal, in-depth, reflective and close-to-practice thesis will contribute to the field of counselling in a second language, thus contributing to fill the gap in which the transition from novice to expert in a non-native language remains unclear.

A limitation of the research is it derived from one individual’s experiences. It is not a comprehensive discussion. Rather, it is a presentation and reflexive discussion of how I interpret my development as a practitioner. Based on my epistemology, I do believe the quality of this study will illuminate opportunities for future work where

we need more practitioners to speak about their experiences of developing from novice to expert in counselling in a second language to complement my research in this area. Given the scale of the thesis, I restrain to focus on developing a sense of competence in a second language. Thus, here I would like to suggest three specific areas to call for more research to contribute to the investigation. To begin, the gap between empirical studies and psychoanalytic studies on second language use in counselling still requires an amount of research that makes personal and relational meaning to manifest practitioners' development of competence in their second language. The replication of similar work from a variety of countries of origin is also essential for the construction of a more robust body of literature on this subject of becoming a counsellor in a second language. This will facilitate the mapping of diversity in this area and gradually allow trainees, trainers, and researchers to develop a broader insight of this phenomenon. Moreover, future work could benefit from creative design of research to explore the development of a sense of competence rooted in a working language thereafter expanding to the whole sense of self as a person. For example, as a working language leads to a confident and competent self-image or a sense of professional identity rooted in that language, a trainee may grow to integrate that experience into the whole sense of self. It will be fascinating to examine whether using another language could potentially promote the awareness and development of self. Furthermore, counsellor' switching from a non-native language to native language is rarely mentioned in literature. It is not unusual for international trainees to learn counselling in English in developed countries such as Britain and the US, then go back to their home country to practice in their native language. This process of re-acculturation and re-formulating appropriate

counselling terms is also worth engaging in a theoretical dialogue according to the needs of the profession of counselling.

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